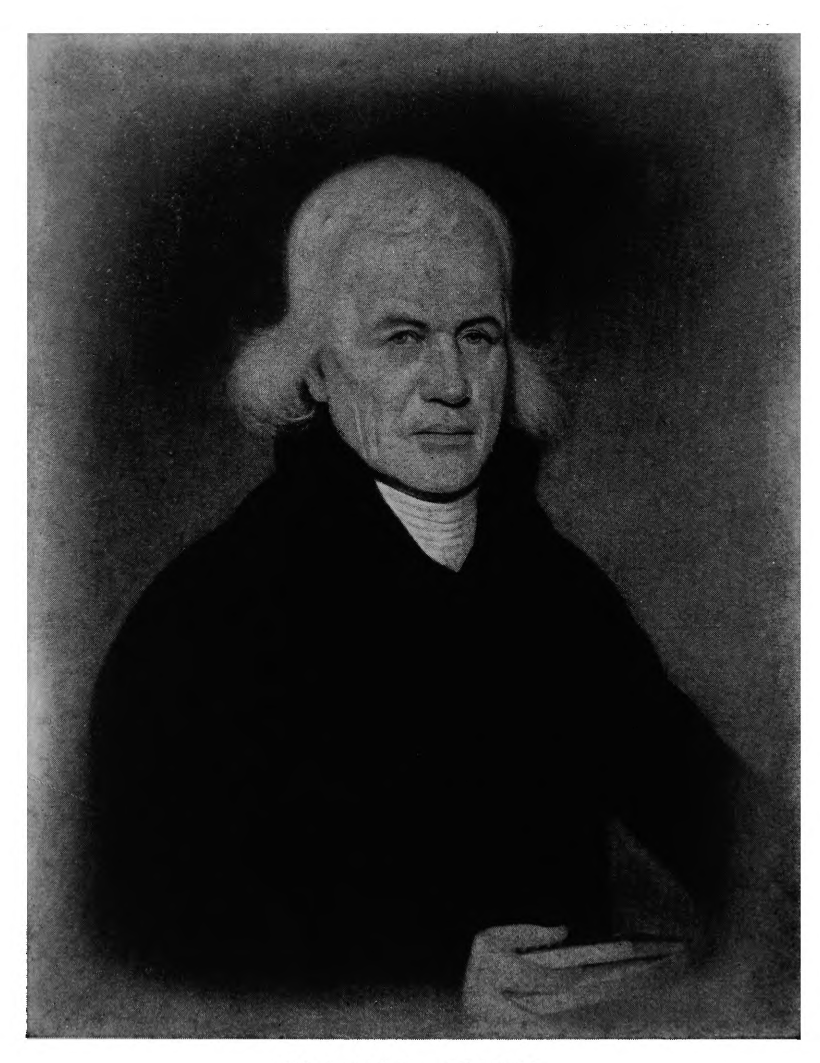
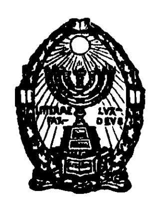


FRANCIS ASBURY
[Ætat. circa 63]
From the Portrait painted by Bruff in 1808

FRANCIS ASBURY

THE PROPHET OF THE LONG ROAD

BY
EZRA SQUIER TIPPLE



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IN REVERENT AND GRATEFUL PRAISE
OF AN ITINERANT PREACHER AND
CHRISTIAN GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL,
THE REVEREND EZRA S. SQUIER AND
HIS DAUGHTER, MY MOTHER.

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CHAPTER I

FOREWORD

Before he died Francis Asbury enjoined that no life of him should be written. Enough had been said about him, he felt—and against him—while living. Moreover, would not his Journal, which was begun and written with this thought in mind, and is therefore largely autobiographic, give all necessary information concerning his manner of life and his ceaseless activities throughout his long and distinguished ecclesiastical career? And what more need be said of him after he had finished his course, having kept the faith, than was said of La Tour d'Auvergne, the warrior of Breton, fallen in battle, when his name was called and some comrade in arms who held him in loving remembrance, responded, 'Dead on the field'?

One day a sister of Thomas Carlyle asked him whom he desired for his biographer. 'I want no biography,' was his curt answer. 'But there will be many biographies of you written,' she persisted. Men of power of achievement cannot escape this fate, however much they may wish to.

Asbury's demand was unreasonable. It was inevitable that 'many biographies' of him would be written. The year following his death, at the Annual Conference in Baltimore, March, 1817, Bishop McKendree spoke of the importance of having an authentic and comprehensive Life of his late colleague and friend; the Conference concurred in his views, and a committee to carry them into execution was appointed and given authority to select some one for the important task. This was done, but the choice seems not to have been a fortunate one, for at the General Conference in 1824, seven years having passed, the Rev. William Beauchamp, one of the most prominent members of that Conference, was requested to become the biographer of the still lamented leader, but he died before he had time to enter upon the work. This project failing, it would appear that the Rev. Robert Emory purposed writing a Life, and gathered a considerable quantity of valuable material, which later came into the possession of Drew Theological Seminary, where the Emory Collection of Manuscripts is regarded as among its most valued treasures.

Of this collection, as well as of other important collections and letters and manuscripts in the same library, I have made much use. Strickland's *The Pioneer Bishop:* or, *The Life and*

Times of Francis Asbury, appeared in 1858; *The Character and Career of Francis Asbury, Illustrated by Numerous Selections from his Journal, Arranged in Chronological Order,* by the Rev. Edwin L. Janes, in 1872; Briggs's *Bishop Asbury: A Biographical Study for Christian Workers,* in 1879; Smith's *Life and Labors of Francis Asbury,* in 1898; and Dr. George P. Mains' small but valuable *Francis Asbury,* in 1909.

Methodism has had some distinctive features by which it has been distinguished from other denominations, and which account for its success. Among these are its system of church government, its ardent, effective evangelism, its rational, scriptural, and preachable theology, its aggressive missionary spirit, its teaching concerning experimental salvation, and the freedom and warmth of its services, especially of its preaching and singing. To no man are we more indebted for the currents of denominational power flowing through our history than to Francis Asbury.

A hundred years have now passed since this man of extraordinary greatness, who in his generation did more for Christianity on this continent than any other, died, and it seems only fitting that in this centennial year of his death the attention of his spiritual descendants should

be directed to this colossal figure of our denominational history, for 'with Wesley, Whitefield, and Coke, he ranks as one of the four greatest representatives of the Methodist movement, and in American Methodism he ranks immeasurably above all his contemporaries and successors.' This has been my object in writing this volume. I have not attempted to write another 'Life'—this book is not so much a biography as it is an estimate of the man. It is not the history of a movement, but the study of a personality. Henry Boehm, who knew him intimately, having traveled more than forty thousand miles with him, declared: 'Bishop Asbury possessed more deadness to the world, more of a self-sacrificing spirit, more of the spirit of prayer, of Christian enterprise, of labor, and of benevolence, than any other man I ever knew; he was the most unselfish being I was ever acquainted with.' Beyond any other person he embodied the genius and spirit of early Methodism. Among Methodism's noblest sons he has the preeminence, and though not canonized should be forever enshrined in our hearts, as our Saint Francis, the Prophet of the Long Road.

CHAPTER II

THE FLAME

WHEN Francis Asbury was born, August 20, 1745, the fire of the 'Evangelical Revival' in England had been burning for some years. The story of this marvelous religious awakening will never lose its interest. However often it may be repeated, it will never become stale or commonplace any more than the rays of the sun grow old. The romance and charm of the beginnings of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century are second only to the fascinating and stirring account of the early days of Christianity. Moreover, have they not many features in common? Methodism was more nearly a renewal of primitive Christianity than any movement of the centuries since the apostles. It was a revival of the teachings of Christ and of the attitude of his disciples toward personal religion and toward society, and of the whole spirit and purpose of the gospel.

If what accredited English writers say of that period is even half true, England in the early decades of the eighteenth century was a sorry

spectacle, in spite of the fact that it had men of brilliant genius like Bolingbroke, Walpole, and Chesterfield, and men of learning like Butler, Warburton, Whiston, and Gibson, Bishop of London, 'whose piety was equal to his erudition.' This was the century too of Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, and what men of light and power they were! On the other hand, 'Jonathan Swift was playing the part of a clever ecclesiastical buffoon,' and the clergy as a rule were impotent as teachers of a pure Christianity. Bishop Burnet said in 1713: 'The much greater part of those who come to be ordained are ignorant to a degree not to be apprehended by those who are not obliged to know it. . . . They can give no account, or at least a very imperfect one, of the contents even of the Gospels.' The plain precepts of the Scriptures were disregarded by priests and people. The Bible was a neglected book. Sunday was a day of sport, and clergymen were notoriously active in their observance of the day in this fashion. The fox-hunting parson is a conspicuous figure in the literature of the eighteenth century. Religion was a term rather than a life. The predominating characteristic of the period was the prominence given to external morality. Emotion had no place in religion. The entire sufficiency of natural religion was blatantly asserted by many so-called

teachers. Much of the skepticism of the day took the form of deism. Hume was a deist, and so was the other historian, Gibbon. The practice of extempore preaching had died out, and preachers droned platitudes by the hour. There was no vigor, no intensity of zeal, no ardent emotion, no compelling unction, in the preaching of the age. Philanthropy—there was nothing of the sort worth speaking about. Religion was at low ebb. Writers of that period tell us that gin-drinking had become a mania, being an almost universal habit, and, indeed, that every kind of sin had some writer to champion and teach it, and a bookseller and hawker to divulge and spread it.[1] It was a debased and wicked age. 'Never had century arisen on Christian England so void of soul and faith as that which opened with Queen Anne, and which reached its misty noon beneath the second George —a dewless night succeeded by a sunless dawn. There was no freshness in the past, and no promise in the future. The Puritans were buried, and the Methodists were not born. The philosopher of the age was Bolingbroke, the moralist was Addison, the minstrel was Pope, and the preacher was Atterbury. The world had the idle, discontented look of the morning after some mad holiday, and, like rocket-sticks

[1] Tyerman, *Life and Times of John Wesley*, vol. i, p. 62.

and the singed paper from last night's squibs, the spent jokes of Charles and Rochester lay all about, and people yawned to look at them. The reign of buffoonery was past, but the reign of faith and earnestness had not commenced.'[1] That is not a pleasant picture, but it is a true one. The English court was entirely corrupt, the Established Church was little better, and like king and priest like people! England needed Methodism. Abounding wickedness could only be overcome by abounding grace, and God never fails his children.

Just at the hour when the situation was most utterly dark, deplorable, and unpromising, something happened—a fire broke out, and soon the Methodist poet of awakened, renewed England was singing with ecstatic exultation,

> See, how great a flame aspires,
> Kindled by a spark of grace,
> Jesus' love the nations fires,
> Sets the kingdom all ablaze.

It was wonderful what was happening. People did not realize the significance of it all at the time, but they did later. Lecky, the judicial historian of the England of that century, makes this interesting comparison: 'Although the career of the elder Pitt and the splendid victories by

[1] Tyerman, *Life and Times of John Wesley*, vol. i, p. 61.

land and sea that were won during his ministry form unquestionably the most dazzling episodes in the reign of George II, they must yield, I think, in real importance to that religious revolution which shortly before had begun in England by the preaching of the Wesleys and Whitefield.' A more recent writer gives this as his estimate of the influence of the Methodist revival upon England: 'The religious revival of that period had the office of a healthful salt in the national blood. It purified domestic life. It wove bonds of quick and generous sympathy betwixt all classes. It put a more robust fiber into the national character. It gave a new tenderness to charity, a nobler daring to philanthropy, a loftier authority to morals, as well as a new grace to religion. So it helped to cleanse the national life.'

What was the beginning of this revival which was so far-reaching in its effects? When and where did Methodism have its birth? Isaac Taylor says with much justice: 'The Wesleys' mother was the mother of Methodism in a religious and moral sense; for her courage, her submissiveness to authority, the high tone of her mind, its independence, and its self-control, the warmth of her devotional feelings, and the practical direction given to them, came up and were visibly repeated in the character and conduct of

her sons.'[1] There is much in heredity. Her father was Dr Samuel Annesley, and what manner of man he was may be inferred from the title given him, 'the St. Paul of the Nonconformists.' Though Susanna Wesley was the wife of a clergyman of the Established Church, the blood of ecclesiastical independence and absolute fidelity to conscience flowed in her veins. The paternal grandfather of the Wesleys was an itinerant minister of like unflinching loyalty to convictions, who was imprisoned a half dozen times by the enemies of religion, living a simple, godly life among fisher-folk with joy, and a successful winner of souls, who greatly desired to go as a missionary to America.[2] Was not the founder of Methodism a true successor of this devoted man? John Wesley's father was trained for the Nonconformist ministry, but later became a clergyman of the Church of England, an earnest, devoted servant of the church. It has ever been the proud boast of the followers of Wesley that Methodism was born in a university. It is truer to say that it had its beginning in a long line of sturdy Christian ancestors esteeming wisdom above riches, and in the Epworth Rectory, a Christian home and school.

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[1] *Wesley and Methodism*, p. 19.
[2] Telford, *Life of Wesley*, p. 6.

The Methodist movement, however, may be said to date from the formation of the Holy Club at Oxford—for which Charles Wesley was largely responsible—a small group of earnest-minded young students, who were close friends, and who being religiously inclined met together at first every Sunday evening, then two evenings a week, and finally every evening from six to nine o'clock. John Wesley was not at Oxford when the friends first came together, nor did he return to the university until after the name 'Methodists' had been given to the methodical group; but when he did return he was at once recognized as the head of the group and was designated the curator, or father of the Holy Club. The little society had numerous other names tacked to it, such as the Godly Club, Bible Moths, the Reforming Club, Enthusiasts; but the one destined to outlast all others was 'Methodists,' which was given the members of the society by a young gentleman of Christ Church, who, impressed by the exactness and regularity of their lives and studies, said with a smile, 'Here is a new sect of Methodists sprung up.' And the name stuck. It had been securely fastened. Little could that young Oxford student have dreamed, when he thus labeled the members of the Holy Club, that in less than two centuries millions upon millions of people

in all the earth would be proudly wearing the name! The three commanding figures in this national awakening were John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, all three of whom, strangely enough when we consider the immense distance across the Atlantic and the difficulties and discomforts of travel in the eighteenth century, and easily comprehensible when we remember the religious zeal and devotion of the men, came to America as missionaries, Whitefield making thirteen voyages across the ocean, and laboring with brilliant success throughout the length and breadth of the colonies, the others giving themselves after a brief but momentous period in Georgia to the spread of scriptural holiness in England.

The remarkable progress of the Wesleyan revival in England was due under the blessing of God to three outstanding features of the movement—preaching, hymn-singing, and organization. The part that the sermon played in that religious awakening can never be estimated. Preaching is a divine institution. What more romantic in history than the story of the Christian pulpit? Are there more wonderful adventures recorded than those dared and achieved through preaching? Moreover, preaching best expresses the genius of Protestantism. It was Martin Luther who held that there could

be no true worship where there was no true preaching. And the surpassing testimony to the effectiveness of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was that wherever the doctrines of the Reformation spread pulpits were set up, and wherever pulpits were set up the cause advanced by leaps and bounds. The same was true of the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century. All the great revivals of the centuries have been brought about through preaching. Almost without exception the great reform movements of the ages have been begun and carried forward by preachers. The prophet, the preacher, has been God's wonder-worker through the centuries, and how mightily God used him in the century of which I am writing! Men were saying in that century, when Hugh Blair was uttering commonplaces in Edinburgh, as they are saying now, that the day of preaching had gone by, when, lo! a thousand insistent voices were heard along the highways of that 'fair island, set in silver,' and a new day had dawned.

As *the* preacher of that period no man more worthily deserves the crown of supremacy than George Whitefield. Of his eloquence Hume, who, as a diversion from writing history, went to the Tabernacle, London, said that Whitefield was the most ingenious preacher he had ever heard, and that it was indeed worth coming

twenty miles to listen to him. He then repeated a striking passage which occurred toward the close of a sermon which had peculiarly impressed him, and added, 'This address was accompanied by such animated yet natural action, that it surpassed anything I ever saw or heard in any other preacher.' Gillies, Whitefield's earliest biographer, who gives this testimony and other such, declares that they are 'set down, not for their weight, but for their singularity.' But Hume's testimony must be given weight. He certainly never spoke such generous words of his preacher friends, Laurence Sterne and Dean Swift. Benjamin Franklin, who was Whitefield's first publisher in America, and who, when Whitefield on his second visit to America wrote him from Boston, asking him to secure lodgings for him in Philadelphia, bade him welcome to his own house, was puzzled to understand how it was that Whitefield met with such favor wherever he went in America. Yet he speaks enthusiastically of the matchless delivery of his sermons. Samuel Johnson thought little of Whitefield's oratory, but conceded his popularity. Men of letters, like Pope and Horace Walpole, derided him. Warburton, after reading his *Journal,* declared he was mad as ever the Quaker George Fox was. Hogarth caricatured him. 'Fanatic' and 'hypocrite' were favorite titles applied to

him. There were those, however, who appraised him at his real worth. Hervey, who was brought into a knowledge of saving grace by him; Doddridge, who opened his pulpit to him; Isaac Watts, himself an extemporaneous preacher of no mean ability; Venn, John Newton, and Toplady, one of Whitefield's friends, all acknowledged his unmatched ability as an orator, and gave him credit for having been useful in the course of his ministry to tens of thousands. Nor must Cowper's famous eulogium be forgotten:

He followed Paul—his zeal a kindred flame,
His apostolic charity the same.
Like him, crossed cheerfully tempestuous seas,
Forsaking country, kindred, friends, and ease;
Like him he labored, and like him, content
To bear it, suffered shame where'er he went.

But the preaching of Whitefield, or of John or Charles Wesley, or of all the 'Evangelicals,' cannot fully account for the swiftness with which the fires of the Evangelical Revival spread. The hymns of Charles Wesley had much to do with it. The saintly Fletcher of Madeley felt that 'One of the greatest blessings that God has bestowed upon the Methodists, next to their Bible, is their collection of hymns.' James Martineau once made a similar but more sweeping statement: 'After the Scriptures, the Wesley hymn book appears to me the grandest instrument of

popular religious culture that Christendom has ever produced.' A modern writer says: 'Psalmody, which had been neglected in England beyond what some readers would suppose, the Wesleys took up from the beginning, with a clear-sighted view of its importance, and with a zeal that insured success. Methodism never could have become what it did without its unparalleled hymn book. That, perhaps, has been more effective in preserving its evangelical theology than Wesley's *Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament.* Where one man read the homilies and the exposition, a thousand sang the hymns. All divisions in Christendom have a stamp imprinted on their piety, by which they are easily known. As to the *fervor* of Methodism, there can be no mistake; and it is owing largely to the concrete and personal character of its psalmody. It does not deal in the calm, intellectual contemplation of abstract themes, however sacred and sublime; but in the experience of believers, as soldiers of Christ, "fighting," "watching," "suffering," "working," and "seeking for full redemption." You catch in them the trumpet-blast, the cry of the wounded, the shout of victory, and the dirge at a warrior's funeral.' [1] John Wesley was the father of the Methodist hymnody, being both a writer and a translator of

[1] Stoughton, *Religion in England in 1800–1850*, p. 23.

hymns; but Charles Wesley is Methodism's most illustrious poet. 'The Evangelical Revival seems to have silenced John Wesley's muse, whilst it woke up Charles to a poetic fervor which only ceased with his last breath.' It was his conversion which lighted the sacred fires of Charles Wesley's poetic genius. When he experienced the blessed joys of sonship—

My God is reconciled,
  His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for his child,
  I can no longer fear—

all the springs of his nature burst into song, and soon all England was singing such glorious hymns as, 'Christ the Lord is risen to-day'; 'O for a thousand tongues to sing'; 'Depth of Mercy! can there be'; 'Soldiers of Christ, arise'; 'O Love divine, how sweet thou art!' 'Come on, my partners in distress'; 'And are we yet alive?' and 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,'—this last Henry Ward Beecher said he would rather have written than to have had the fame of all the kings of all the earth. The effect of the singing of these hymns of the gospel was indescribable. Austin Phelps once said that for the planting of great Christian truths deep in the hearts of an awakened people there is nothing comparable to John Wesley's tongue of fire, seconded by Charles Wesley's

hymns floating heavenward on the twilight air from ten thousand Methodist voices. 'Under such conditions Methodism is inspired. To know what Methodist voices are under that inspiration one must hear them. Mobs, bellowing with infuriated blood-thirst, which neither John Wesley's coal-black eye nor Whitefield's imperial voice could quell, have been known to turn and slink away when the truth was sung at them in Charles Wesley's hymns. Their ringleaders more than once broke down in tears and groans of remorse. They took the preacher by the hand, and went his way with him, arm in arm, swearing by all that is holy that not a hair of his head should be touched. Thus is Martin Luther's saying verified anew, "The devil can stand anything but good music, and that makes him roar." '

In particular Charles Wesley's 'invitation hymns' were of great value in the spread of the Flame. 'They strike a new note. They are the battlesongs of an open-air preacher. . . . His meters are light and lilting, winning the ear of the simple and arresting the casual passer-by. Only a preacher, perhaps only an open-air preacher, could have written such hymns. They are not hymns of the oratory, of the classroom, or the village church; but of that vast cathedral whose roof is the blue vault of heaven; they are songs of Moorfields, of Kingswood, of Newcastle, and

of Gwennap. Perhaps of all Wesley's hymns these are the most characteristically Methodist,' and always effective.

But unapproached as was Charles Wesley as a sacred poet, and immeasurable as was his contribution to the Evangelical Revival, brilliant as was Whitefield as an orator, greater than either of them, measured by any standard, was John Wesley. He may not have been as great an orator as Whitefield, though some writers rank him above Whitefield as a preacher; but granting that he was not the greatest preacher of his day, he was, as Fitchett says, Methodism's foremost and most diligent preacher.[1] Nor was he a poet of mere ordinary ability. His brother was a far more prolific hymnist, but John Wesley had exceptional gifts, both as a writer and translator of hymns. He was by all odds the most commanding figure of the Evangelical Revival. Buckle calls him 'the first ecclesiastical statesman,' and he was. His genius for government was unsurpassed. It was he who harnessed the forces of the revival and unwittingly builded a Church. Augustine Birrell thought 'no other man did such a life's work for England; you cannot cut him out of our national life.' Horace Bushnell puts him in a class with Chrysostom, Augustine, and Luther. Brierley, in his Essays,

[1] Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, p. 190.

compares Wesley with Paul, Bernard of Clairvaux, and others. Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, George William Curtis, and other American writers speak with appreciation of the best known figure in Great Britain during the half century when the great Revival was stirring both England and America. He was the very genius of this far-reaching religious movement. What marvelous versatility he showed! He was an indefatigable and very skillful controversialist, a voluminous writer, and a still more voluminous editor. He moves with such rapidity that it is with difficulty that we follow him. To travel two hundred thousand miles over rough roads, after he is nearly forty years of age, to write books without number, to preach forty thousand sermons, to organize societies, and counsel with his helpers, to carry on an extensive correspondence, to inaugurate reform and philanthropic movements, to do all these and more almost staggers belief. As a leader and director, the world has seen few superiors; military men recognized in him a mighty strategist. In war he would have been a greater general than Wellington. He was endowed with matchless courage, and, like Becket, he never showed to better advantage than in moments of peril. Mobs quailed before his flashing eye. When he looked at foes they became his stanch defenders. Like all great

leaders, he had an indomitable will. Difficulties were as summer breezes, opposition was like a song of birds. He was a master of system. His sermons and his daily life alike were planned with great minuteness. His schedules were inflexible and were religiously adhered to. The loss of a moment of time was a dire calamity. Life was too short to have any briefest portion wasted or unimproved. He regarded time as something sacred, for every fragment of which he had to give an account.

But not yet have we the secret of the Flame. Neither genius for organization, nor other superlative gifts will account for John Wesley's influence on England in the eighteenth century, an influence which will have produced, in the judgment of Robert Southey, 'the greatest effects centuries or perhaps millenniums hence, if the present race of men should continue so long.' The secret of Wesley's surpassing power over men must be sought in the realm of the spiritual. May, 24, 1738, will ever be a memorable date in history, secular and ecclesiastical. Lecky says that date marks the beginning of a new epoch in England. It was on that day that the 'something happened' of which I have already made mention. That was the appointed day,—

The earth was still—but knew not why;
The world was listening—unawares.

How calm a moment may precede
One that shall thrill the world forever!—

when God bestowed upon his chosen servant, singled out for a mighty work, the divine gift which made him the prophet of a new life. The story of this memorable hour as Wesley recites it has become a classic: 'In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ; Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine,* and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.' For years Wesley had been searching for God's deep peace. He had tried asceticism, but it had failed to give him rest of soul. He had gone as a missionary to Georgia, but not even in his work among the Indians had he found the joy of the Lord; but from that moment, when he felt his 'heart strangely warmed,' he realized that he had reached the center, and forever after he dwelt there in security and sweet content. He knew that he had passed from death unto life. He was a new man in Christ Jesus. He had been 'converted,' and for more than a century and a

half 'conversion' has been a word of large import to Methodism. Some modern psychologists will doubtless find in this Aldersgate experience of John Wesley no more than Coleridge found in Charles Wesley's conversion—merely a recovery from pleurisy or something of the sort; but speculations as to the new birth, the nature of conversion, are far afield when one is in the presence of a converted man. Arthur Christopher Benson, in a biographical study of Bishop Wilkinson, after saying that it was always told of Wilkinson that he was converted by his own first sermon, says: 'Conversion was a word which carried great weight in Cornwall. I don't know what test exactly was applied, but the Celtic temperament was able to decide from the look, the utterance, the gestures of a preacher, whether the change had taken place. It made a great difference to the effectiveness of my father's ministrations when it was realized and freely stated that he was a converted man.' John Wesley knew better than anyone else what had happened. And soon others knew it. From the meeting in the room in Aldersgate he hurried to where Charles Wesley was lying sick, and as he entered the room he shouted, 'I believe.' 'We sang a hymn with great joy and parted with prayer,' wrote Charles in his diary. The hymn which they sang together

is thought to have been one which Charles Wesley had recently composed in the glow of his own conversion, beginning,

Where shall my wondering soul begin:
  How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
  A brand plucked from eternal fire.
How shall I equal triumphs raise,
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?

The music of this hymn 'runs through the whole history of Methodism; the experience it reflects is repeated wherever a human soul with intelligent faith receives Christ.'[1] Then Wesley began to preach what had not been heard as now since Luther's day, the doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ. He told the story of his conversion. Men laughed at him. He declared that he had come in personal communion and fellowship with God. Men mocked. He affirmed that his sins had been forgiven, and the world sneered; but the fire of his belief spread. Into the England of 1738 torrents of personal experience of grace and sublime Christian assurance were let loose. The effect was immediate and overwhelming.

These three men, all of them, had somehow relearned the lost secret of Christianity. Something of its early power had fallen upon them. A gleam of the fiery tongues of Pentecost was

[1] Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, p. 124.

in their speech; a breath of its mighty rushing wind was in their lives. The evidence of that strange, persuasive power is found in each of the three, and wherever they appeared there were manifestations of the same divine power. 'On the first night of 1739,' says Wesley himself, 'Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles, were present at our love feast, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily amongst us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord." '

And now the work spreads. Wesley and his preachers go everywhere in England and Scotland preaching justification by faith and winning multitudes of converts. In the early years no little opposition was encountered, but by 1757 the age of riots and mobs was past. Methodism was now organized and societies were formed in many places and chapels built. Kingswood School had been started, Wesley had opened a dispensary in London, had begun the publication of books and tracts, had purchased a house for 'the reception

of needy and deserving widows,' and had given support to other benevolent enterprises. By 1760 he had visited every county in Ireland. That year he found three towns on that island in which lived descendants of the settlers who had come from the Palatinate a half century before, where there was neither cursing, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, nor ale-houses among them, and from which already emigrants were going to the New World, carrying, as we shall soon see, the germs of Methodism with them. At the Conference which met in 1769 there was reported a list of more than a hundred preachers and a membership of nearly thirty thousand. There were forty-nine circuits, and the fiftieth would soon be added, and its name would be 'AMERICA'!

CHAPTER III

THE CHALLENGE

In 1771 Wesley's preachers met for their Annual Conference in Bristol. The month was August, and there were more than a hundred preachers present. At least one of these had never attended a Methodist Conference before. That he was in attendance at this session determined to an extent no writer can estimate both the character and the conquests of Methodism in America and throughout the world. The moment was pregnant with illimitable manifestations of spiritual power, though no man may have seen the circling horsemen and chariots in the clouds that day when John Wesley rose in the Conference and with much solemnity remarked, 'Our brethren in America call aloud for help,' and then expectantly inquired, 'Who will go?' On the instant, as if summoned to the judgment bar of God, there sprang to his feet a young man of twenty-six, with a restless nature like David Livingstone and William Taylor, such a nature as makes pioneers and heroes, 'separated unto the gospel' like Paul, and as firmly persuaded of his call to lands beyond as that doughty mis-

sionary, having a zeal equal to his courage, and a courage as fine as his consecration to the coveted task, who offered himself, was accepted and appointed to what proved to be the work of his life.

And who was this young man, this Methodist preacher, this missionary volunteer, who with such quiet modesty and ardent eagerness accepted the challenge of Mr. Wesley to go to the help of 'our brethren in America'? I am inclined to allow him to introduce himself, and tell of those twenty-odd years of his life before that day when standing in the presence of his spiritual father and his colleagues of the order of Methodist preachers, with gleaming eyes and glowing lips he asked to be sent to the far lands beyond the sea. It is, I believe, as he would like it, for after he had been in America twenty-one years, he wrote in his Journal, July 19, 1792: 'As very probably all of my life which I shall be able to write will be found in my Journal, it will not be improper to relate something of my earlier years, and to give a brief account of my first labors in the ministry.' His thoughts were undoubtedly directed in autobiographical channels at this particular time by a *Life of Wesley*, 'the work of Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore, containing five hundred and forty-two pages,' which was 'in general well compiled,' Asbury thought, though he could but feel as he said that 'the history of

American Methodism is inaccurate in some of its details and in some which are interesting.' Mr. Wesley had died the previous year. Asbury felt 'the stroke most sensibly,' and now after some fifteen months, while in New York, he obtained a copy of the important biography of the fallen Methodist chieftain. As he read with keenest interest, yet poignant personal sorrow, the wonderful life of this great ecclesiastical statesman, how natural that his own swiftly passing years should come before him, and the boyhood days in old England vividly rise up before his memory, and 'angel faces, loved long since and lost awhile,' throng the room of the house where he was a guest during the session of the New York Conference. Soon the Lord would be at his door, perhaps, and sorrowing multitudes would desire an account of his life. They could learn of his labors from his Journal, but the 'unknown years,' how could they know of these? He himself would 'relate something' of them, and this is the story as he wrote it down:

I was born in Old England, near the foot of Hampstead Bridge, in the parish of Handsworth, about four miles from Birmingham, in Staffordshire, and according to the best of my after-knowledge on the twentieth or twenty-first day of August, in the year of our Lord 1745.

My father's name was Joseph, and my mother's Elizabeth Asbury. They were people in common

life; were remarkable for honesty and industry, and had all things needful to enjoy; had my father been as saving as laborious, he might have been wealthy. As it was, it was his province to be employed as a farmer and gardener by the two richest families in the parish. My parents had but two children—a daughter called Sarah, and myself. My lovely sister died in infancy; she was a favorite, and my dear mother, being very affectionate, sunk into deep distress at the loss of a darling child, from which she was not relieved for many years. It was under this dispensation that God was pleased to open the eyes of her mind, she living in a very dark, dark, dark day and place. She now began to read almost constantly when leisure presented the opportunity. When a child, I thought it strange my mother should stand by a large window poring over a book for hours together.

From my childhood, I may say, I have 'neither dared an oath, nor hazarded a lie.' The love of truth is not natural, but the habit of telling it I acquired very early; and so well was I taught that my conscience would never permit me to swear profanely. I learned from my parents a certain form of words for prayer, and I well remember my mother strongly urged my father to family reading and prayer; the singing of psalms was much practiced by them both. My foible was the ordinary foible of children—fondness for play; but I abhorred mischief and wickedness, although my mates were among the vilest of the vile for lying, swearing, fighting, and whatever else boys of their age and evil habits were like to be guilty of. From such society I very often returned home uneasy and melancholy; and although driven away by my better principles, still I would return, hoping to find hap-

piness where I never found it. Sometimes I was much ridiculed and called *Methodist Parson*, because my mother invited any people who had the appearance of religion to her house.

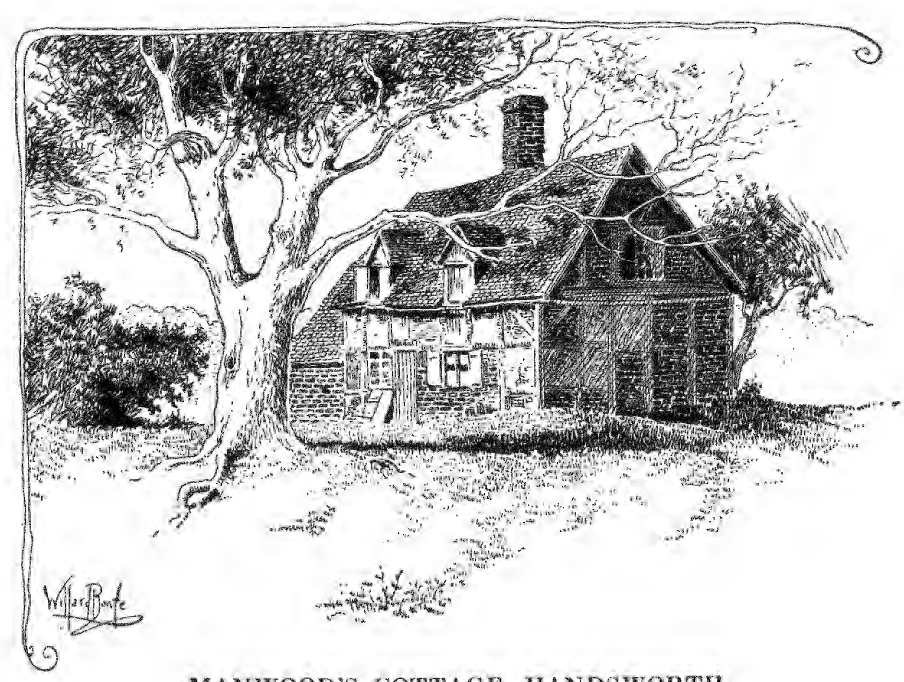
I was sent to school early, and began to read the Bible between six and seven years of age, and greatly delighted in the historical part of it. My schoolmaster was a great churl, and used to beat me cruelly; this drove me to prayer, and it appeared to me that God was near to me. My father, having but the one son, greatly desired to keep me at school, he cared not how long; but in this design he was disappointed, for my master, by his severity, had filled me with such a horrible dread that with me anything was preferable to going to school. I lived some time in one of the wealthiest and most ungodly families we had in the parish; here I became vain, but not openly wicked. Some months after this I returned home, and made my choice, when about thirteen years and a half old, to learn a branch of business at which I wrought about six years and a half. During this time I enjoyed great liberty, and in the family was treated more like a son or an equal than an apprentice.

Soon after I entered on this business God sent a pious man, not a Methodist, into our neighborhood, and my mother invited him to our house; by his conversation and prayers I was awakened before I was fourteen years of age. It was now easy and pleasing to leave my company, and I began to pray morning and evening, being drawn by the cords of love, as with the bands of a man. I soon left our blind priest, and went to West Bromwich Church; here I heard Ryland, Stillingfleet, Talbot, Bagnall, Mansfield, Hawes, and Venn, great names, and esteemed gospel ministers. I became very serious,

reading a great deal—Whitefield and Cennick's Sermons, and every good book I could meet with. It was not long before I began to inquire of my mother, who, where, what were the Methodists; she gave me a favorable account, and directed me to a person that could take me to Wednesbury to hear them. I soon found this was not the Church, but it was better. The people were so devout, men and women kneeling down, saying 'Amen.' Now, behold! they were singing hymns, sweet sound! Why, strange to tell! the preacher had no prayer book, and yet he prayed wonderfully! What was yet more extraordinary, the man took his text, and had no sermon book: thought I, this is wonderful indeed! It is certainly a strange way, but the best way. He talked about confidence, assurance, etc., of which all my flights and hopes fell short. I had no deep conviction, nor had I committed any deep known sins. At one sermon, some time after, my companion was powerfully wrought on. I was exceedingly grieved that I could not weep like him; yet I knew myself to be in a state of unbelief. On a certain time when we were praying in my father's barn I believed the Lord pardoned my sins and justified my soul; but my companions reasoned me out of this belief, saying, 'Mr. Mather said a believer was as happy as if he was in heaven.' I thought I was not as happy as I would be there, and gave up my confidence, and that for months; yet I was happy, free from guilt and fear, and had power over sin, and felt great inward joy. After this we met for reading and prayer, and had large and good meetings, and were much persecuted, until the persons at whose houses we held them were afraid, and they were discontinued. I then held meetings frequently at my father's house, exhorting the people there, as also



THE REPUTED BIRTHPLACE OF FRANCIS ASBURY



MANWOOD'S COTTAGE, HANDSWORTH, STAFFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND

In which Asbury began his itinerant ministry

at Sutton Colefield, and several souls professed to find peace through my labors. I met class a while at Bromwich Heath, and met in band at Wednesbury. I had preached some months before I publicly appeared in the Methodist meetinghouses; when my labors became more public and extensive, some were amazed, not knowing how I had exercised elsewhere. Behold me now a local preacher!—the humble and willing servant of any and of every preacher that called on me by night or by day; being ready, with hasty steps, to go far and wide to do good, visiting Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and, indeed, almost every place within my reach, for the sake of precious souls; preaching generally, three, four, and five times a week, and at the same time pursuing my calling. I think, when I was between twenty-one and twenty-two years of age, I gave myself up to God and his work, after acting as a local preacher near the space of five years. It is now the nineteenth of July, 1792: I have been laboring for God and souls about thirty years, or upward.

Some time after I had obtained a clear witness of my acceptance with God the Lord showed me, in the heat of youth and youthful blood, the evil of my heart. For a short time I enjoyed, as I thought, the pure and perfect love of God; but this happy frame did not long continue, although, at seasons, I was greatly blessed. While I was a traveling preacher in England I was much tempted, finding myself exceedingly ignorant of almost everything a minister of the gospel ought to know. How I came to America, and the events which have happened since, my Journal will show.[1]

This autobiographical account of the early

[1] Tipple, *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, pp. 339-344.

years closes so abruptly, and so many things are left unsaid, that we are doubtless right in inferring that the pressure of Conference business and other duties prevented his writing at greater length. Besides, he had referred to his youth often before. Soon after coming to America, one Sunday in July, 1774, he preached on the parable of the prodigal son. Later in the day, when thinking about his sermon, he wrote in his Journal: 'Does it not appear from this parable that some who, comparatively speaking, have all their lifetime endeavored to please God, and are entitled to all his purchased communicative blessings, are nevertheless not favored with such rapturous sensations of divine joy as some others?' And then his boyhood days come up before him, and he adds: 'I remember when I was a small boy I had serious thoughts and a particular sense of the being of God, and greatly feared both an oath and a lie. At twelve years of age the Spirit of God strove infrequently and powerfully with me, but being deprived of proper means and exposed to bad company, no effectual impressions were left on my mind.' He recalled the 'innocent diversions' of which he was fond, and that he 'abhorred fighting and quarreling.' He had not yet forgotten that when anything of this kind did happen he 'always went home displeased.' He felt keenest sorrow this Sabbath,

as he had often before, when he was living over his youth, that 'so many Sabbaths were idly spent which might have been better improved.' It was a comfort to him to remember that wicked as his companions were he had 'never imbibed their vices.' He tells of his first hearing the Methodists, and of another occasion when 'another person' went with him to hear them again, and the text was 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.' The sermon had no effect upon him, but his 'companion was cut to the heart.'

Nor was this the only time when he referred to the years before leaving England. Two decades later he writes: 'I was recalling by the help of Mr. Wesley's *Journal* how long it had been since I became acquainted with the Methodists.' In 1798, when he was in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and saw in the 'Presbyterian meetinghouse' there the tomb of the 'old prophet, dear Whitefield,' he recalls with thankfulness that it was Whitefield's sermons which had established him in the doctrines of the gospel more than anything that he had ever heard or read up to the time of his coming to America, so that he 'was remarkably prepared to meet reproach and persecution.' This same year while in New York, he received confirmation of the death of his father, and writes down: 'I now feel myself

an orphan with respect to my father. Wounded memory recalls to mind what took place when I parted with him nearly twenty-seven years next September; from a man that seldom, if ever, I saw weep—but when I came to America, overwhelmed with tears with grief he cried out, "I shall never see him again." Thus by prophecy or by Providence he hath spoken what is fulfilled.' With what satisfaction he must have added this sentence, 'For about thirty-nine years my father hath had the gospel preached in his house.' This would make the earliest preaching in the home to have been when Asbury was a lad of fourteen.

How often in his journeyings he must have lived over his boyhood days! How frequently he must have talked, especially when his host was 'a Yorkshire man,' or a person from some other part of England, of the old parish of Handsworth, Hamstead Hall, the seat of the ancient family of Wyrley, of Bromwich Heath, and the old Saxon town of Wednesbury, in the very heart of the 'black country.' In memory he could see the broad and beautiful valley of Hamstead, through which flowed the River Tame, and the house, no longer standing, where he was born, and the house in Great Barr, just over the parish boundary of Handsworth, where 'for fifty years her hands, her house, and her heart were open

to receive the people of God and ministers of Christ,' to which they had moved shortly after his mother had received pardoning mercy. He must have talked of his school days, though there was very little to say concerning these. He was not a graduate of any of England's famous schools, though his father had earnestly desired for him a complete education. It was otherwise ordered, however, and before he was fourteen, about the time of his conversion, he was apprenticed to a blacksmith. Within a short distance of his father's house was a famous forge, the only one ever built in that neighborhood, and one of the first in the whole district. At night the lurid flames, flashing up from its furnaces, could be seen along the whole valley, and by day its ponderous machinery and huge water-wheels aroused his interest. At the head of the smith's department, where the tools required in the other branches of the work were made and repaired, was a Methodist who had recently come from Monmouthshire, between whose wife and Mrs. Asbury had grown up an intimate friendship. And it was to this Methodist layman that Asbury was apprenticed, and here he worked for about six years and a half. Surely, God was in all this. What better training for his future work could this Methodist lad have received? If God had designed him to do John Wesley's

work in England, he would have needed John Wesley's university training; but for the pioneer work which God had in mind for him to do in America the years which he spent in the blacksmith's shop of that Old Forge, during which his muscles were strengthened and his bodily strength increased, were infinitely more valuable to him than had they been spent in a university. The anvil on which he wrought is still reverently preserved as a precious memento of his providential early training.[1]

The part which Asbury's Methodist master played in his conversion and in his subsequent giving of himself to the ministry will not be known. It is true that in the autobiographical sketch which Asbury wrote he says that it was largely through the conversation and prayers of 'a pious man, not a Methodist,' who had moved into their neighborhood, that he was first 'awakened.' But it was just after this that he was apprenticed to Mr. Foxall, who must have encouraged him in the development of his religious life. It may have been he who, when Asbury told him that he was not being helped by the ministration of the 'dark priest,' officiating at the church which the family attended, suggested that he go to the old parish church of West Bromwich, the rector of which, the Rev.

[1] Briggs, *Bishop Asbury*, pp. 12–14.

Edward Stillingfleet, was one of the 'evangelicals,' and with his curate, the Rev. Mr. Bagnall, preached with 'almost Methodist plainness, fidelity and fervor.' The Earl of Dartmouth, the founder of Dartmouth College, was a Methodist, and one of Stillingfleet's parishioners, and a close friend of the Countess of Huntingdon, who opened her beautiful home to Whitefield and other 'evangelicals', and where in Lady Huntingdon's drawing room assembled many of England's nobility. Mr. Stillingfleet was often to be found in this circle, and meeting there such distinguished 'evangelicals' as Ryland, Venn, and Hawes, he invited them to preach in his pulpit, where the young Asbury heard them. No wonder that under such preaching he became deeply serious, and that through his associations with his Methodist master there was born a desire to know more of the Methodists. It was not, however, until the summer of 1760, when in his sixteenth year, that he came to an assured knowledge of grace in Christ. Alexander Mather was holding prayer meetings at Wednesbury, at which he urged penitents, with his characteristic fervor, 'to believe *now,* to come to Christ *now* without any other qualification than a sense of their own sinfulness and helplessness.' Asbury could not withstand the pressure of these earnest exhortations, and leaving

one of the meetings at which the preacher had been particularly fervent and importunate, he went with his friend, probably William Emery, to his father's barn, where there came to him an experience not unlike that which came to Wesley in Aldersgate Street, London. Briggs, in his *Life of Asbury,* says that that old barn thus became invested for him with an attractive sacredness. It appears to have been in a tumble-down condition, nevertheless Asbury so regularly resorted to it for personal communion with God that the neighbors were wont to say that it was kept standing by his prayers.[1]

From this time Asbury's religion was to him, as to so many others of the early Methodists, a rapture. He was happy in Christ Jesus. It was not long now before his song was,

O, that the world might taste and see
  The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
  Would all mankind embrace.

The steps were easy. His mother took him with her to a meeting for women which she conducted every two weeks, that he might read the Scriptures and announce the hymns. After he 'had been thus employed as a clerk for some time, the good sisters thought Frank might venture a word of exhortation. So after reading I would venture

[1] Briggs, *Bishop Asbury,* p. 17.

to expound and paraphrase a little on the portion read. Thus began my gospel efforts when a lad.' Then followed meetings for prayer in his father's house at which he led, and in the house of a friend where, following his exhortation, 'several souls professed to find peace through my labors,' and his great work as a soul-winner had begun; then the leader of a class, a local preacher, a supply preacher, a traveling preacher; then at the Bristol Conference appointed to travel the America Circuit, which was to become within a few years, in the providence of God, the largest episcopal see ever under the jurisdiction of a bishop of any church.

Even in those early years of his ministry, however, he exhibited certain traits of character which are much in evidence throughout his American career. There is in existence a letter dated, Darlison, 23 May, 1766, written by one W. Orp, who was Mr. Wesley's 'assistant' on the Staffordshire Circuit that year, and reading as follows:

Dear Frank—After having so firmly engaged you to supply Hampton and Billbrook at the end of the week, I could not but be surprised to hear you are turned dictator. Certainly you must either *think* I was not able to see the places properly supplied, or else that I am fickle and inconstant, and therefore you expect to hear my *new* mind. I take this opportunity of informing you, that I shall not be at those

places, and shall expect you to see them supplied in due time. It is true another preacher is come; but he goes immediately into the low round; in the mean time I wish you would hearken to those verses of Hesiod:

> 'Let him attend his *charge*, and careful trace
> The right-lin'd *furrow*, gaze no more around;
> But have his mind employ'd upon the work.'

Then I should hope to hear that your profiting would appear unto all men. You have lost enough already by *gazing all around;* for God's sake do so no more. I wish I could see you on your return from Hampton on Sunday evening. I shall be at Wednesbury if it please God. I have a little concern to mention. I hope you'll call.[1]

Whatever the ground of the transgression, which brought upon the young preacher so sharp a rebuke, whether excessive humility or strong self-will, it affords us an interesting glimpse of a great personality in the making.

The Challenge which Wesley voiced that August day in 1771 did not take Asbury by surprise. America had been much in his thought. It was a name often heard in England in those days. Whitefield had voyaged to America again and again, and returning to England had told of the religious destitution and needs and unparalleled opportunities of the new world. The relation of the colonies to England was becoming a matter of acute discussion. There was a

[1] Emory Collection of MSS., Drew Theological Seminary.

growing sentiment among the colonists many of whom were dissenters in religion as well as republicans in politics which looked toward independence. They could not forget the circumstances under which their ancestors had come to America. In 1755 John Adams, then a young school teacher in Connecticut, wrote in his diary: 'In another century all Europe will not be able to subdue us. The only way to keep us from setting up for ourselves is to disunite us.' It was natural that Asbury's attention should be directed toward America, for during those early years of his ministry in England there was parliamentary discussion of the right of England to tax the colonies which had been questioned and would be again. The voice of the incomparable Pitt was heard pleading for the inherent rights of the colonies, but his words fell upon unheedful ears, and in 1765 the celebrated Stamp Act was passed, the news of which aroused America as nothing else had done. Muffled bells in Philadelphia and Boston sounded a dirge of death. In New York a copy of the infamous Act was borne through the streets with a death's head nailed to it and a placard with this inscription, 'The folly of England and the ruin of America.' It is not strange that America was much talked about in England and that Asbury's attention was thus directed to the

people across the Atlantic. Moreover, tidings of the beginning of the Methodist movement in New York and elsewhere had reached the ears of Wesley and his preachers. Missionaries had been sent. Reports told of the whitening fields and the need of more laborers. Asbury heard, went to his knees, harkened to God's voice, and reached his decision, and having reached his decision, journeyed to the Bristol Conference. Having been accepted for the work in America, Asbury returned to his home to break the news to his parents, who clung to him, their only child, with passionate affection. Asbury thought upon this painful experience of parting in all the later years with a surging heart. It had burned itself upon his memory and was as fresh when news reached him in Baltimore in 1802 of the death of his mother as the day when he departed from her, never to see her again. I cannot forbear giving the tribute to her which he entered in his Journal after her death:

And here I may speak safely concerning my very dear mother; her character to me is well known. Her paternal descent was Welsh, from a family ancient and respectable, of the name of Rogers. She lived a woman of the world until the death of her first and only daughter, Sarah Asbury. How would the bereaved mother weep and tell of the beauties and excellencies of her lost and lovely child, pondering on the past in the silent suffering of hopeless grief. This afflictive providence gra-

ciously terminated in the mother's conversion. When she saw herself a lost and wretched sinner she sought religious people, but 'in the times of this ignorance' few were 'sound in the faith,' or 'faithful to the grace given.' Many were the days she spent chiefly in reading and prayer. At length she found justifying grace and pardoning mercy. So dim was the light of truth around her, from the assurance she found, she was at times inclined to believe in the final perseverance of the saints. For fifty years her hands, her house, her heart, were open to receive the people of God and ministers of Christ, and thus a lamp was lighted up in a dark place called Great Barr, in Great Britain. She was an afflicted, yet most active woman, of quick bodily powers, and masculine understanding. Nevertheless, 'so kindly all the elements were mixed in her,' her strong mind quickly felt the subduing influences of that Christian sympathy which 'weeps with those who weep,' and 'rejoices with those who do rejoice.' As a woman and a wife she was chaste, modest, blameless; as a mother (above all the women in the world would I claim her for my own) ardently affectionate; as a 'mother in Israel' few of her sex have done more by a holy walk to live, and by personal labor to support the gospel, and to wash the saints' feet; as a friend, she was generous, true, and constant.[1]

His devotion to his parents was one of the most beautiful traits of his character. They were much in his thought. In his letters to them he uses such endearing forms of address as 'My ever dear Father and Mother,' 'My very dear Parents', 'My most dearly beloved Mother', and

[1] Tipple, *Heart of Asbury's Journal,* pp. 504, 505.

the like. In 1772 he wrote them from Baltimore, 'I long to hear oftener from you.'[1] Just before the Christmas Conference in that city in 1784, he wrote; 'I was thankful to God that I heard of your welfare by Brother Whatcoat; who is safe arrived to help us.'[2] At a later date he wrote them:

Last evening I made an arrangement for a remittance to you by my agent, John Dickins. It will come into your hands in the space of three or four months. . . . I have sold my watch and library, and would sell my shirt before you should want. I have made a reserve for you. I spend very little on my self. My friends find me some clothing. I might have money, but the wicked world and those that leave our connection, strive to blacken my character by saying, I have the profits of books at my command, and profits from the college, and the schools established in many parts of America. These reports I am able to refute, and yet, they say, 'He remits money to his parents every year.' The contents of a small saddlebag will do for me, and one coat in the year. Your son Francis is a man of honor and conscience. As my father and mother never disgraced me with an act of dishonesty, I hope to echo back the same sound of an honest, upright man.[3]

It was a grief to this loving, devoted son to leave his home, and it was a constant sorrow through the long years that he had to be separated from his parents, but having heard the voice of God, God's will became his will.

[1] Emory Collection MSS. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

My very dear, and never to be forgotten, Father and
mother,

I have received your Letters, written in 795 and 1796, and must wish you to get some friend to write very circumstantially once a year. I have been laying by in the hands of our general Book Steward in Philadelphia, about twenty Guineas. The distance, and the difficulties of remitting money, are greater at least in such small sums. I have now wished that the only way will be for our General Book steward to send his orders to Mr George Whitfield, in London. I have strong opinion as of Brethren, on both sides the water, that they will take care of you, if I was dead! But all flesh is grass! It is with the greatest difficulty I can see you supplied while in life; and as much whisper and noise at the I have sent you this sum. How will it be when I am gone hence! Next to leaving the [illegible] I feel for you. We must leave you and I to trust God. It gives me pleasure to think you have kept open house near 40 years, and spent what you had to share on the cause of God. I hope my dear Neighbours, and the rising Generations, will not forget to praise God, and remember the house of his being, that brought and supported the Gospel among them. If I were to leave America I should break my heart, and if I stay perhaps shall break my constitution, but here I must die! May you find a safe passage from England, to glory. I [illegible] a
and I from America
small present for each
a Coat
[illegible] my mother

I have settled with Doctor Coke for the Ten pounds. If the Doctor should offer you money you may take it. I shall use every prudential means to pay him. I must now, as I have done this Thirty and Eight years, commend you to God, and remain your unworthy yet grateful Son, F. Asbury.

Virginia
Novr 20, 1797.

Nov. 97.

To Joseph Asbury
at Great Barr
Staffordshire

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

In Weyman's New York Gazette, March 16, 1761, there appeared the advertisement of one *Phil. Embury, School Master,* giving 'notice that on the first day of May next he intends to teach Reading, Writing and Arithmetic in English in the New School House now building in Little Queen Street next door to the Lutheran Minister's.' This announcement appeared in three subsequent issues of the same newspaper, March 23, April 20 and 27. How many pupils appeared in the 'New School House' 'in Little Queen Street,' now Cedar Street, the third street south of John Street, May first, is not known.

Just about five years later another announcement was made to the effect that a Methodist service would be held in the private dwelling of the same Philip Embury When this service was held, and at which the erstwhile schoolmaster preached, there were five people who heard him—his wife, Margaret Embury, Paul and Barbara Heck, John Lawrence, and Betty, a colored servant of the Hecks. It was not a large congrega-

tion but that was the beginning of 'The Church in the Wilderness.' The year of that first Methodist sermon in the United States, 1766, is a memorable year in Methodist annals, for it was this year that Methodism began its conquest of the New World, and the very year when Francis Asbury, a timid, untrained youth of twenty-one, began to travel and to preach in his native land, under the direction of John Wesley. Only five years later the voice of this young preacher, destined in the providence of God to be the most conspicuous instrument in spreading the holy flame of the Evangelical Revival in America, would be heard in the pulpit built by Philip Embury's own hands.

But there is a story of 'beginnings' before Asbury's arrival on these shores which is well worth telling. The English colonies in America had long been in John Wesley's thought. Nor is this strange. Not only did he think of the whole world as his parish, but there were strong personal reasons for his concern for America. Thirty years before Philip Embury began to preach in New York, John Wesley, then a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, was urged by Governor Oglethorpe, of the English Colony in Georgia, who had returned to London to solicit aid for the colony which had been established at Savannah for the benefit of the poor, to accom-

pany him on his return to America in order to work among the Indians. The proposition appealed to the young Oxford religionist, but he sought the advice of William Law, the author of the *Serious Call,* a book which at a critical time in Wesley's life had exercised a powerful influence on his mind; he also conferred with his friend John Clayton, and then went to Epworth to lay the matter before his mother, who, with buoyant courage, said, 'If I had twenty sons I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I never saw them more,' and on October 14, 1735, he sailed from Gravesend, England, as an accredited missionary to the Indians from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The thought uppermost in his mind, however, was not the conversion of the Indians, nor the organization of a new ecclesiastical movement; but, as he writes, 'My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I cannot hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there.' It has been said that Wesley's mission to Georgia was a failure. But was it? Could such self-denying labors be without results? George Whitefield, who left England the day before Wesley arrived home, wrote upon his arrival in Georgia: 'The good John Wesley has done in America is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people, and he has laid

a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake.' Whitefield was even more of a prophet than he realized. The foundations are still unshaken! Tyerman, Wesley's chief biographer, in speaking of the work of the founder of Methodism in Georgia, asks: 'Who could have imagined that in one hundred and thirty years this huge wilderness would be transformed into one of the greatest nations upon earth, and that the Methodism begun at Savannah would pervade the continent, and, ecclesiastically considered, become the mightiest power existing?'[1] It has ever been a joy to American Methodists to remember that their spiritual captain once lifted the banner of his divine Lord upon this continent, and the ground touched by his tireless feet will forever be sacred to them. In a sense, therefore, Methodism in the New World had its beginnings a generation before the date usually named.

There have been differences of opinion as to the place of the earliest planting in America, and to whom the credit belongs, whether to Embury at New York, or Strawbridge in Maryland. While this is not the place for any extended discussion of this question, a word or two at least must be said. For many years, three quarters of a century at least, there was no debate

[1] Tyerman, *Life and Times of Wesley*, vol. i, p. 115.

as to where Methodism in America began. All the Methodist historical writers of that period, with possibly one exception, concur in fixing the starting point of the movement in New York. And this is the judgment of the best historians of the denomination, such as Stevens, Wakeley, Buckley, and Faulkner. Moreover, the question is discussed so exhaustively by Atkinson in *The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America,* and the proof which he furnishes is so cumulative and convincing that the starting point of American Methodism must be regarded as settled.[1]

When that first Methodist service was held early in 1766 in New York, that city had a population of but twelve thousand, and the entire colony only eighty-five thousand. Philadelphia was the commercial and social metropolis, and in 1774 became the seat of the Colonial Congress. These two and Boston were the only cities of any size. There were thirteen colonies, all of which had grown and prospered. In 1760 the total population amounted to less than a million and seven hundred thousand, and of these three hundred thousand were blacks. Massachusetts was the strongest colony, with more than two hundred thousand people of European ancestry within her borders. In matters of education

[1] Buckley, *History of Methodism in the United States*, vol. i, p. 142.

New England also took the lead, its system of instruction being so complete that at the time of the Revolution there was not to be found in all New England an adult born in the country who could not read and write.[1] For the most part the Americans were an agricultural people. In Virginia there was not an important town, scarcely a village of any considerable size in Georgia. There were few roads available for the use of the widely scattered population, and easy communication between the different sections of the country was impossible. When, in 1766, the year of Methodism's beginning, an express wagon made the trip from New York to Philadelphia in two days, it was considered a marvel of rapidity. But in spite of the difficulties of communication, and the scarcity of books, and the general poverty of the resources of knowledge, it was no unusual thing to find at the foot of the Virginia mountains, in the quiet precincts of Philadelphia, along the banks of the Hudson, or in the New England valleys, men of learning and power, such as Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams, and Judge Robert R. Livingston,[2] whose gifted daughter later was to marry one of the Methodist pioneer preachers, Freeborn Garrettson, a

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[1] Ridpath, *History of the United States*, p. 282.
[2] Ridpath, Ibid., p. 283.

gentleman of the old school and a preacher of conspicuous ability.

There were numerous churches and religious institutions in the colonies before 1766. The churches were generally Calvinistic. 'The Pilgrims of Plymouth were Calvinists; the best influences of South Carolina came from the Calvinists of France; William Penn was a disciple of the Huguenots; the ships of Holland that first brought colonists to Manhattan were filled with Calvinists.' The Presbyterians were numerous, particularly in the middle colonies. In New England the churches were mostly of the Congregational Order, but there were also Baptists and Quakers. In the South the Church of England was the chief ecclesiastical organization, though the Baptists were even more numerous than in New England. In and near Philadelphia there were many Quakers. But in many portions of the country there was much indifference to true religion, and the shepherds of souls were few indeed.[1] A new day dawns, however, and into the spiritual apathy and religious unconcern of the American colonies a bit of new leaven is thrust early in the year 1766.

The incidents leading up to the holding of the first service in New York are a part of the romance of American Methodism. It was a game

[1] Atkinson, *The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement, etc.*, p. 138.

of cards, it is said, that was responsible for the first Methodist sermon in New York. Be that as it may, this is beyond dispute, a woman by the name of Barbara Heck, suddenly realizing the spiritual needs of herself and her neighbors, said one day to an Irish carpenter, who some ten years before in Ireland had come under Methodist influence, and for some time had been a local preacher, and said it with a directness that was startling, 'Brother Embury, you must preach to us or we shall all go to hell, and God will require our blood at your hands.'

'But where shall I preach?' the troubled man inquired, 'or how can I preach, for I have neither a house nor a congregation?'

'Preach in your own house and to your own company first,' she answered.

His responsibility being thus pressed upon him, how could he refuse to comply with the request? And the service to which reference has already been made at the beginning of this chapter was held, and Embury preached. There must have been in New York at that time English and Irish immigrants who had been reached by Wesley and his preachers in their native land. Surely, among the troops in the British garrison there were some whose memories were stirred by the jubilant notes of the Methodist hymns which came floating through the open windows

of Philip Embury's cottage on Barrack Street, and who were thus drawn to the services, now regularly held.

Jesse Lee's account of the growth of that first little society is so simple and quaint that it deserves to be given in every record of those early days:

> In about three months after, Mr. White and Mr. Sause, from Dublin, joined with them. They then rented an empty room in their neighborhood adjoining the barracks, in which they held their meetings for a season: yet but few thought it worth their while to assemble with them in so contemptible a place. Some time after that, Captain Thomas Webb, barrack-master at Albany, found them out, and preached among them in his regimentals. The novelty of a man preaching in a scarlet coat soon brought great numbers to hear, more than the room could contain. Some more of the inhabitants joining the society, they then united and hired a rigging loft to meet in, that would contain a large congregation.[1]

The Rigging Loft was rented in 1767. Bishop Scott once called attention to the propensity the early Methodists in America had for worshiping in rigging lofts, inasmuch as they made use of them not only in New York but also in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Here in the Rigging Loft Captain Webb was often seen and heard. And what more picturesque figure in the long

[1] Lee, *History of the Methodists*, p. 24.

history of American Methodism than Captain Thomas Webb, 'soldier of the cross, and spiritual son of John Wesley,' with a green patch over one eye—he had lost his right eye at the siege of Louisburg—with a scarred right arm—he had been wounded at the battle of Quebec—and with a soul on fire for God! When he was forty-one this rugged soldier had heard Wesley preach in Bristol, and the following year, 1765, he joined a Methodist society, and was almost immediately licensed to preach. What a preacher he was! 'A man of fire,' Wesley characterized him, 'the power of God constantly accompanies his word'; 'an inexperienced, honest, zealous, loving enthusiast,' remarked Charles Wesley of him to a friend. John Adams, the statesman, and second President of the United States, having heard him in 1774, described him as 'the old soldier—one of the most eloquent men I ever heard; he reaches the imagination and touches the passions very well, and expresses himself with great propriety.'[1] By more than one he has been compared with Whitefield, who possessed in a superlative degree the glorious gift of eloquence. Fletcher of Madeley esteemed Captain Webb both for his character and his labors, and tried to persuade Benson, the commentator, to give himself, as a co-laborer with Webb, to the work

[1] Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* vol. i, p. 60.

in America. Too great praise cannot be given to the old soldier who, though not honored as the first leader of American Methodism, must always be considered the principal founder of the American Methodist Church,[1] for it was largely through his efforts that the denomination spread into Long Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, that chapels were erected, and that recruits came from England.

Under his preaching and Embury's the attendance upon the meetings in the Rigging Loft steadily grew until a new place of worship became a necessity. The leaven was working. And now again the faith and courage of Barbara Heck triumphed. This 'model of womanly piety,' who saw the need before anyone else, 'made the enterprise a matter of prayer,' and one day in classmeeting told how she had 'looked to the Lord for direction, and had received with inexpressible sweetness this answer: "I the Lord will do it."' Nor was that all: 'A plan for building was presented to my mind,' she said, which she described in a characteristic fashion to the members of the society, who, finding it both practical and economical, adopted it.[2] But it was Captain Webb who made possible the erection of a church at that time. Without his

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[1] Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* vol. i, p. 66.
[2] Wakeley, *Lost Chapters,* etc., p. 66.

financial aid and influence it may be doubted if the project could have been undertaken. He headed the list of contributors with a subscription of thirty pounds, to be followed by many of the citizens of New York, including clergymen, lawyers, doctors, teachers, merchants, and other prominent people. There are two hundred and fifty-seven names on the subscription paper which is preserved in the archives of the New York Methodist Historical Society. Wesley sent money, books, and a clock; Philip Embury made the pulpit, and from it preached the dedicatory sermon October 30, 1768, and in which three years later, November 13, 1771, Francis Asbury was to be heard for the first time in New York as he preached to a large congregation from the text, 'I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2. 2). In this church, named Wesley Chapel, probably the first church to be called by Wesley's name, but now for many years known as Old John Street Church, Embury and Webb continued to preach for about a year, when the old order passed away and a new order began.

While these two were preaching in New York there was another religious awakening in Maryland, two hundred miles to the south, of which they knew nothing. The date of Robert Straw-

bridge's first sermon in Maryland may never be known, but the fact that he built a log chapel on Sam's Creek is well established. There was no need to circulate a subscription paper for the erection of this primitive meetinghouse. The site of the Wesley Chapel in New York cost six hundred pounds; here one could be had for the asking. Willing hands felled the trees and squared the logs. The building was a rude structure without windows, door, or floor, and though long occupied was never completed. 'Yet it was a true sanctuary. Beneath its rough pulpit Strawbridge laid to rest two of his children. Its unplastered walls echoed with the triumphant shouts of sinners redeemed through the mercy of God.' Restless by nature and conscious of the needs of the new settlements which were unvisited by the lethargic clergy of the Established Church, Strawbridge went in every direction preaching with glowing lips the sure word of the gospel. 'Wherever he went he raised up preachers,' and wherever he preached sinners were converted.

The year that the church edifice was being erected in New York—1768—John Wesley received a long letter from across the sea. It was signed 'T. T.,' the writer being one Thomas Taylor, who six months before had come from England, and on landing having inquired 'if

any Methodists were in New York,' 'was agreeably surprised in meeting with a few here who have been and desire again to be in connection with you.' His object in writing to Wesley was to give him 'a short account of the state of religion in this city,' to tell him of the beginnings and growth of Methodism in New York, and to make an important request. The request was this:

There is another point far more material, and in which I must importune your assistance, not only in my own name, but also in the name of the whole society. We want an able and experienced preacher; one who has both gifts and grace necessary for the work. God has not, indeed, despised the day of small things. There is a real work of grace begun in many hearts by the preaching of Mr. Webb and Mr. Embury; but although they were both useful, and their hearts in the work, they want many qualifications for such an undertaking; and the progress of the gospel here depends much upon the qualifications of preachers. In regard to a preacher, if possible, we must have a man of wisdom, of sound faith, and a good disciplinarian: one whose heart and soul are in the work: and I doubt not but by the goodness of God such a flame will soon be kindled as would never stop until it reached the great South Sea. We may make many shifts to evade temporal inconveniences, but we cannot purchase such a preacher as I have described. Dear sir, I entreat you, for the good of thousands, to use your utmost endeavors to send one over. With respect to money for the payment of the preachers' passage over, if they could not procure it, we could

sell our coats and shirts to procure it for them. I most earnestly beg an interest in your prayers, and trust you, and many of our brethren, will not forget the church in this wilderness.[1]

Such loyalty as this deserved to be rewarded. Others also urged Wesley to send helpers to the new and growing work in America. Captain Webb wrote to him, as did Thomas Bell, who 'had worked six days on the new chapel.' Dr. Wrangel, a Swedish missionary, who had been laboring in Philadelphia, meeting Wesley in London, strongly appealed to him to send preachers to the American Christians, 'multitudes of whom are as sheep without a shepherd.' Yet Wesley did not immediately respond. The work in England was demanding his serious and constant attention. But he was not long unmindful of the call of 'the church in this wilderness.'

In the Library of Drew Theological Seminary is the earliest American membership ticket extant, being dated October 1, 1769, and bearing the name of Hannah Dean, who became the wife of Paul Hick, though not to be confused with Paul Heck, the husband of Barbara Heck, the founder of American Methodism. It is signed by Robert Williams, who was the first preacher in England to respond to the Macedo-

[1] Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* vol. i, pp. 57, 58.

nian cry from the English colonies in America. Hearing of the religious needs of the people beyond the sea, he applied to Wesley for authority to go there to preach. There are some grounds for thinking that he set out without permission, but it seems more than likely that Wesley acquiesced, on condition that he should labor in subordination to the missionaries who were about to be dispatched. With urgent zeal Williams appealed to his friend Ashton, later an important member of Embury's society in New York, and who was induced to emigrate to America by the promise of Williams to accompany him. Williams, learning that his friend was ready to depart, sold his horse to pay his debts, and carrying his saddlebags on his arm, set off for the ship, with a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk, but no money for his passage. Ashton paid the expenses of the voyage, and they landed some months before the missionaries arrived, Williams entering at once into a kind of semi-pastoral relation with the expectant society in New York.

The appeals of 'T. T.' and others were now at last to be productive of results. At the Leeds Conference in 1769 Wesley again referred to the urgent desire of the Methodists in America for accredited preachers—he had mentioned the matter at the Conference the year previous, but

action had been deferred—and called for volunteers. Two men who had heard the letter of 'T. T.' at the Bristol Conference of 1768, and who during the year had been 'frequently under great exercises of mind respecting the dear Americans,' and finding 'a willingness to sacrifice anything for their sakes, . . . could not be satisfied to continue in Europe,' offered themselves, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor. Wesley's account of the transaction is characteristically concise and businesslike:

> On Thursday I mentioned the case of our brethren at New York, who had built the first Methodist Preaching House in America, and were in great want of money, but much more of preachers. Two of our preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, willingly offered themselves for the service; by whom we determined to send them 50£ as a token of our brotherly love.

That the matter was not brought to a conclusion the year before undoubtedly, in the providence of God, worked for good, for journeying northward from Bristol after the Conference adjourned to take his appointment, Boardman arrived at the village of Moneyash, where occurred an incident which has caused his name to be held by English Wesleyans in everlasting remembrance. On reaching the village the young preacher inquired whether there were any Methodists resident in it, and was directed

to a cottager, who gladly offered him entertainment for the night. In the course of the evening he preached, and with subdued feelings under his freshly awakened sense of duty toward the English colonists on the distant continent which now continually attracted his thoughts, he read for his text these plaintive words: 'And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested' (1 Chron. 4. 9, 10). One of his hearers that evening was Mary Redfern, a thoughtful girl, who had previously felt her lost spiritual condition and was earnestly seeking salvation. The sermon afforded her the guidance she needed and she 'found peace in believing.' Naturally, the text upon which this casual, but to her eventful, discourse was based, was ineffaceably impressed upon her memory. Ten years afterward she became the wife of William Bunting, and when their first and only son was presented for Christian baptism 'his mother called his name Jabez,' in grateful commemoration of the discourse which had been the instrument of bringing her to Christ

as her Saviour. Thus really, though remotely, does the earliest mission to America connect itself with one of the greatest preachers, one of the most powerful missionary advocates, and the most eminent legislator and ruler that Methodism ever produced.[1]

It is not surprising that the English press ridiculed the project of sending preachers to the colonies, announcing with mocking satire certain forthcoming promotions among the Methodists, including the Rev. John Wesley, Bishop of Pennsylvania, and the Rev Charles Wesley, Bishop of Nova Scotia. But jest or irony never yet stayed the progress of the kingdom of God. Those first missionaries, being worthy sons of a great spiritual leader, were not to be deterred by ridicule. Richard Boardman was thirty-one, a 'pious, good-natured, sensible man, greatly beloved by all who knew him.' He had passed through deep waters of affliction, for when he offered himself for the work in America 'the grass was not yet green over the grave in which the remains of his wife and little daughter lay side by side.' Joseph Pilmoor was about the same age, and had been a Methodist for fifteen years. He was a man of fine presence, much executive skill, easy address, and a rare courage. These two missionaries landed at Gloucester

[1] Briggs, *Bishop Asbury*, pp. 36, 37.

Point, New Jersey, October 21, 1769, sang the Doxology, walked five miles along the Delaware River to Philadelphia, where they were given a royal welcome by Captain Webb and the society, and immediately began their ministry in America, Pilmoor preaching from the steps of the old State House. What a place for a declaration of the gospel as received by those early Methodists! Ten days later Pilmoor wrote to Wesley with justifiable enthusiasm: 'I have preached several times, and the people flock to hear in multitudes.' [1] A few days later Boardman, who, bearing the evangel, had set out for New York, and, like all those early itinerants, sought and found opportunities to preach everywhere, also wrote to Wesley in a like strain. The leaven was working still more.

From this time forward the work of God was to proceed by leaps and bounds. Boardman began to put the Wesleyan system of regulations in operation in New York. Pilmoor preached so effectively in Philadelphia that a new place of meeting became a necessity. 'The Lord provided for us,' Pilmoor wrote. This church, long known as Saint George's, has the distinction of being the oldest church building occupied by Methodists in the United States. Captain Webb established a preaching place on Long

[1] Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* vol. i, p. 62.

Island. Robert Williams left New York, laboring in Philadelphia with Pilmoor and in Maryland with Strawbridge. He was the apostle of Methodism in Virginia and North Carolina, this man of whom Asbury wrote in his Journal:

> I ventured to preach a funeral sermon at the burial of Brother Williams. He has been a very useful, laborious man; the Lord gave him many souls to his ministry. Perhaps no one in America has been an instrument of awakening so many souls as God has awakened by him.

He sleeps in an unknown grave, but he has the distinction of being 'the first Methodist minister in America that published a book, the first that married, the first that located, and the first that died.' Boardman having come to New York, Philip Embury, accompanied by some of his friends, moved to a small town one hundred and fifty miles from New York, where he continued to labor as a local preacher until his sudden death, the result of an accident while mowing, in 1775. It was an untimely end, but he had planted the handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountain. The fruit of his planting has caused the world to marvel.

The battle lines had extended. Pilmoor and Boardman arranged to exchange stations three or four times a year, and besides their work in these two centers they itinerated into the

surrounding regions. Boardman made missionary journeys from Philadelphia into Maryland and preached in Baltimore. The winter of 1770-71 brought many converts into the society in New York. Pilmoor had introduced such features of the Methodist worship as the love feast and watch night. The young people were 'all on fire for God and heaven.' It was plain that the whitening fields needed still more laborers, even though the forces had already been augmented. John King had come from England late in 1769, and although he bore no license from Wesley to preach, he showed such zeal that Pilmoor authorized him to exhort, and sent him into Delaware. In Philadelphia Edward Evans, one of Whitefield's converts, allied himself with the Methodists and was given permission to preach. It is claimed that he was the earliest native American to begin to preach, and while for years the title of 'first native American preacher' was given to Richard Owen, or Owings, and that of 'first native itinerant' to William Watters, Evans's right to be called the first American Methodist preacher is secure, though, dying before the organization of the Conference, his name has no place on the official records of American Methodism.[1]

There had been progress during the five years

[1] Atkinson, *Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement, etc.*, p. 145.

Thomas Morrell is appointed and advised by the Bishops and Conference to
raise a Subscription in the City of New York in order to erect a New Church on a convenient
Spot at the North or North East part of the City and shall call to his assistance any Person
or Persons recommended by the Bishops or Conference, or in their Absence any Person he
shall Judge proper for his Assistance. the Bishops and Conference do also order that
all the Subscriptions and Collections that shall be raised from time to time on the
said Church when erected, shall be applied for the Benefit Support and Interest of
that New Church, and they do also give Thomas Morrell Authority to appoint Trustees
for the said New Church

Thomas Coke

New York May 27th 1789

Francis Asbury

Photographed from the Original Manuscript belonging to the Author.

FACSIMILE OF THE APPOINTMENT OF THOMAS MORRELL TO COLLECT MONEY FOR THE SECOND METHODIST CHURCH IN NEW YORK CITY

This was signed the same day that Bishops Coke and Asbury signed the address of the American Methodists to the newly inaugurated President of the United States, George Washington.



PERRY HALL, THE HOME OF HENRY DORSEY GOUGH

Near Baltimore, a famous stopping place of Bishop Asbury's, and from which he and others went to the Christmas Conference

since Embury preached his first sermon. Mightily had the word of the Lord prevailed. Converts were flocking by the hundreds to the uplifted standard of the cross. The time had now come for the leadership of some man of intuition, judgment, singleness of purpose, and knowing only Christ, and him crucified. God evidently expected that such an hour would come, for he had been preparing the man. His name was Francis Asbury.

CHAPTER V

ASBURY'S JOURNAL

THE Journal of Francis Asbury is an unusual book. While it has not extraordinary literary merit like Amiel's *Journal,* we could less afford to lose it than the recorded observations of the brilliant Swiss philosopher. I think it is beyond question that Wesley's *Journal* is incomparably superior to Asbury's. Wesley had a trained mind. He was a Charterhouse boy, and entered Christ Church, Oxford, Cardinal Wolsey's famous college, where he was considered a 'very sensible and acute collegian, baffling every man by the subtleties of logic, and laughing at them for being so easily routed; a young man of the finest classical taste.' [1] He breathed the academic atmosphere of that beautiful English university town for fifteen years. It need occasion no astonishment, therefore, that this English scholar's *Journals* give not only the very best picture of the Evangelical Revival in its whole compass and extent, but also form a storehouse of information about English manners during the

[1] *Westminster Magazine,* 1774, p. 180.

eighteenth century, modes of travel, characteristics of English society, and the many books which came under his eye and were appraised with unerring skill.[1] Asbury had no such early advantages of study or contact with scholars. He began to preach at seventeen, the age of Wesley when he went to Oxford, and at twenty-one, Wesley's age at graduation, started upon his itinerant career. Thereafter he knew neither leisure nor rest. But though he was not a college-trained man, he was far from being an uneducated or unlearned preacher. Life to him was a long school-day, as long as the Road he traveled. He sat at the feet of some of life's greatest teachers, such as pain, hunger, cold, opportunity, a vast wilderness and a few great books. God, nature, and solitude were among his instructors. And he did the tasks they set for him, and learned the lessons they taught him, and became wise. He stood in the open and listened, and there came a day when music dropped like honey from his lips. He knelt and prayed out under the stars, and when he spoke men said it was the voice of God. He looked into the faces of men, and they saw he had understanding, and obeyed his will. All his life he was a student, and while his Journal may not be as brilliant a production as Wesley's, it is a surprisingly good piece of work,

[1] Telford, *Life of John Wesley*, p. 202.

for which no apology need be made. Everything considered, I do not know anything which surpasses it. The picture which Asbury gives of America is as fine in its way as Wesley's of England, and as valuable. No man of that period traveled as much or as far as Asbury, and in no other book can there be found a more intimate knowledge of the home life of the colonists, especially on the frontiers, or the social and moral conditions which prevailed.

The Journal is concededly imperfect. Asbury knew this and deplored the fact. But how could it be helped? When the transcriber of his Journals, Francis Hollingsworth, ventured to express regret that some important things had been omitted, 'his reply, uttered with feeling, would have satisfied every candid mind that it was by no ordinary effort so much had been done.' The writer of the Journal knew how incomplete it was. Better than anyone else he knew his limitations, and frequently referred to the difficulties under which he wrote. 'In keeping a Journal of my life,' he says, 'I have unavoidably labored under many embarrassments and inconveniences; my constant traveling, the want of places of retirement and conveniences to write, my frequent calls to the pulpit, my extensive epistolary correspondence, and my debility and sometimes inability of body, have all been

inseparable from my station in the Church and so many impediments to the perfection of the account of my labors and sufferings in this country.' 'To-day I have been occupied in correcting a transcript of my Journal, that one had copied for me, who did not well understand my shorthand. The original was written in my great illness, very imperfectly, but when I reflect on my situation at that time I wonder that it is as well as it is.' Indeed, he might wonder! Again he writes: 'I collected the small remains of strength I had, to read, and hear read my manuscript Journal. It was written in such haste that it was very incorrect.' And it is. No one will claim for Asbury's Journal anything like perfection. There are inaccuracies as to dates, names of places and individuals, and in other matters, but these are comparatively insignificant and in no wise impair the essential facts. The intense ardor, the resistless earnestness, the incredible hardships, and the fervent evangelism of Asbury and the pioneers of early Methodism are all here. They tell their own story, announce a distinctive message, and serve other good purposes.

What was Asbury's object in keeping a Journal? In 1798, weak in body and in much pain, he is employed in revising his Journal, and is moved to exclaim: 'I am like Mr. Whitefield, who, being

presented with one of his extempore sermons taken in shorthand, could not bear to see his own face. I doubt whether my Journals yet remaining will appear until after my death: I could send them to England and get a price for them; but money is not my object.' Money was not his object at any time. He always had something else in view. His Journal was not written for a royalty. There were other and better reasons in his opinion. Under date of July 24, 1774, he gives an account of his conversion, his work in England, and concludes thus: 'September 3, 1771, I embarked for America, and for my own private satisfaction began to keep an imperfect Journal.' And he must have derived not a little personal pleasure, for in 1802 he says: 'For my amusement and edification I was curious to read the first volume of my Journals. I compared my former with my latter self. It was little I could do thirty years ago; I do less now.'

But this was not the only nor the chief reason for his keeping a Journal. In 1784 he makes this entry: 'I spent some time in looking over my Journals which I have kept for fifteen years back. Perhaps if they are not published before, they will be after my death, to let my friends and the world see how I employed my time in America.' Asbury had left England impelled by an all-consuming desire to save those for whom Christ

died. Day and night, in heat and in cold, in cities and in the wilderness, like his Master, he kept repeating, 'I must finish the work thou gavest me to do." While he knew the full measure of his faithfulness to his God-given task, it was the desire that others might also know that he set down where he went and what he did.

February 25, 1789. I have by the help of a scribe marked the States I have traveled through for these twenty years, but the movements are so quick (traveling night and day) it seems to me that the notes upon two or three hundred miles are only like a parish and a day—on paper. The understanding reader that could judge the distances would see that I purpose to have the names of the people at whose houses I have preached, or the Journal will appear utopian.

For this reason the entries in his Journal are largely autobiographical, and mainly records of his own activities. His ideas of what a Journal should contain differed from Wesley's, and after reading Mr. Wesley's *Journal* in 1795 he was more than ever persuaded of the 'great difficulty of journalizing.' While feeling that Mr. Wesley was a man of wide knowledge and learning, he found 'too much credulity, long flat narratives, and coarse letters taken from others in his *Journal.*' June 24, 1804, he writes: 'People unacquainted with the causes and motives of my conduct will always more or less judge of me im-

properly' His Journal would be his vindication. In July, 1815, he writes: 'As a record of the early history of Methodism in America my Journal will be of use, and, accompanied by the Minutes of the Conferences, will tell all that will be necessary to know. I have buried in shades all that will be proper to forget in which I am personally concerned. If truth and I have been wronged, we have both witnessed our day of triumph.'

Asbury with fine discernment appreciated how valuable future historians would find the record which he was making day by day, as the following entry clearly shows:

> I have well considered my Journal; it is inelegant, yet it conveys much information of the state of religion and country. It is well suited to common readers; the wise need it not. I have a desire that my Journals should be published, at least after my death, if not before. I make no doubt but others have *labored;* but in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and those kingdoms which have been civilized and improved one thousand years, and which are under such improvements, no ministers could have *suffered* in those days, and in those countries, as in America, the most ancient parts of which have not been settled two hundred years, some parts not forty, others not thirty, twenty, nor ten, and some not five years. I have frequently skimmed along the frontiers, for four and five hundred miles, from Kentucky to Greenbrier, on the very edge of the wilderness; and thence along Tigers Valley to Clarksburgh on the Ohio. These places, if not the haunts

of savage men, yet abound with wild beasts. I am only known by name to many of our people, and some of our local preachers; and unless the people were all together, they could not tell what I have had to cope with. I make no doubt the Methodists are, and will be, a numerous and wealthy people, and their preachers who follow us will not know our struggles but by comparing the present improved state of the country with what it was in our days, as exhibited in my Journal and other records of that day.[1]

What man had larger knowledge of early Methodism than Francis Asbury? He attended and presided at almost every Annual Conference during his long and illustrious superintendency, stationed all the preachers, everywhere made careful inquiries into the state of the work, and had a wider and more accurate knowledge of the field and the workers than any man of his day. In the preface to the first number of the second volume of his Journal which appeared during his lifetime Asbury wrote: 'As I have been under God and my brethren the principal overseer of work in America, and have constantly traveled from the center to the circumference of the connection, I flatter myself that reasonable men will acknowledge that I have always had an opportunity of obtaining better information relative to the true state of the whole work than any other man could possibly have.' Asbury's Journal is

[1] Tipple, *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, pp. 440, 441.

the best account of early Methodism which we possess.

Parts of the Journals were printed during his lifetime, and were corrected by him, and the manuscript of the remainder revised under his direction and approved up to the year 1807. When finally given a permanent form, it was published in three volumes, Volume I covering the period from August 7, 1771, to December 31, 1786; Volume II, January 1, 1786—December 31, 1800; Volume III, January 1, 1801—December 7, 1815, when his last entry, 'We met a storm, and stopped at William Baker's, Granby,' closes the long, patiently written record. For more than seventy years the Journal was published as it originally appeared. There were no attempts to revise, amend, or correct the text until 1904, when, at the request of several of the bishops, I undertook to do this. Unfortunately, I was not able to compare the printed Journal with the original manuscripts, which were burned in a fire in Mulberry Street, New York, which totally destroyed the Book Concern in 1836, but I was able to verify much that could be verified, to correct palpable errors, and to throw light on many entries by explanatory notes.

Not only is this Journal a mirror of social and religious conditions in the periods covered by it, and especially of the beginnings of American

Methodism, but it is the chief source of materials for every portrait of the greatest evangelist in the United States in the eighteenth century. Here may be seen, for instance, that even though not trained in the schools, he was a student all his life. The Journal abounds with references to reading, writing, meditation, and other habits of the student. As the shrewd man wished, it shows how he used his time. He was never idle. He had the student's sense of the value of time, and rigidly adhered to fixed plans of work. 'I spent the afternoon,' he says, 'in reading Mark's Gospel, making some notes, and planning my future business.' 'My present mode of conduct,' he writes, 'is as follows: to read one hundred pages a day, usually to pray in public five times a day, to preach in the open air every other day, to lecture in prayer meeting every evening; and,' he adds, 'if it were in my power, I would do a thousand times as much for a gracious and blessed Master.'

Diligent always, eager for knowledge, and seizing every opportunity for acquiring it from the moment of his dedication of himself to God's service, before leaving England he had become reasonably familiar with Greek and Hebrew and Latin. 'I have been employed in improving myself in Hebrew tones and points, this being my horseback study,' he writes in America.

What a place for the study of Hebrew! On another occasion he records: 'I spent much of my time in reading the Bible and the Greek Testament.' Again: 'I applied myself to the Greek and Latin Testament, but this is not to me like preaching the Gospel; however, when a man cannot do what he would, he must do what he can.' And yet again: 'My meditations in the Hebrew Bible have afforded me great pleasure. This is the book I study for improvement.' And with what eagerness he seized every opportunity! 'I lodged with Mr. Henry, a Jew. We read Hebrew part of the night, and I should have been pleased to have spent the night thus occupied with so good a scholar.' What a delightful picture this, the itinerant preacher after a sermon 'at an old church' and a wearisome ride on horseback, and the scholarly Jew reading Hebrew together well into the night, way down there beyond the Savannah swamps in Georgia! What if the tired bishop does set down in his Journal the following day, 'My body was wearied with labor and want of sleep,' it was worth it all.

This man was a miser as to time, so eager was he to acquire knowledge. 'We have a little of almost everything, and improve the mind, the languages, divinity, grammar, history, and belles lettres. My great desire is to improve in the

best things.' He always carried books with him, sometimes in his saddlebags, and when there were too many for the saddlebags, in a box. He lamented that he could not pore over a book on horseback 'as Mr. Wesley does in England, but this our roads forbid.' During the Revolutionary days of forced retirement Asbury read and studied almost constantly. There was little else he could do except pray, and he never failed to give a due portion of every day to this spiritual privilege and exercise. He was always busy Take this entry for example: 'Arose before three. I am much employed, but it is good to make the best of every moment and carefully to fill up the space of time that may be lost. O how precious is time! Our moments though little are golden sands.' 'I have endeavored,' he writes on another occasion, 'to improve my time to the best advantage in reading and have seen so much beauty and holiness that I have thirsted and long for more.' No man could ever accuse him of murdering time. He was always diligent, always engaged, always reading, or writing, or preaching, or otherwise toiling, and with this outcome, that through years of patient, persistent effort Francis Asbury became a scholarly man.

It is interesting to note what he read. The list of books is rather a remarkable one, when everything is considered. The day of large

libraries had not yet dawned. In the cities he would have access to but comparatively few volumes, even if he had remained long enough at the centers to make any use of them. His itinerant career, and having no fixed abode, made impossible the accumulating of any considerable number of books. The books which he did read were not taken from the shelves of a comfortable and ample library, but from his saddlebags. There is something pathetic about this to one who enjoys the privileges of many books, and the bookish atmosphere which always prevails where books stand row above row in a place which a man calls his study. What self-denial Asbury, who had the instincts of a student and who was ever eager to learn, must have practiced! Not the least of his sacrifices when he accepted a wandering commission for the American continent was the sacrifice which he made in giving up large opportunities for reading and for study. But in spite of the difficulties under which he carried on his reading, despite the fact that he could not easily obtain books, notwithstanding his long, hard journeys and the unfavorable conditions for work at the end of tiresome days of travel, Asbury read much and read well. He read wisely, also, not confining himself simply to doctrinal treatises or sermonic literature. He read history, poetry, biography. He read criti-

cally, making annotations. He read for information, for inspiration, and that he might help his preachers and the Church. He read when he was sick and when he was tired. 'Notwithstanding my illnesses,' he writes, 'I have read Neal's *History of the Puritans,* consisting of four volumes, in about two months.' This was a book which seems to have appealed to him. Neal was an English dissenting divine, born in 1678, dying in 1743. His *History of the Puritans,* which was his chief work, was written with great minuteness and accuracy, but frequently palliates the errors of the Puritans. It is just the sort of a book which would appeal to a man of the type of this pioneer bishop, being a record of sturdy dissent, of splendid courage, and heroic endurance. Sometimes he read out of curiosity: 'I had the curiosity,' he said, 'to read Graham's *Journey through England,'* but his motives were usually of another sort. Sometimes it was with a desire to help those to whom he ministered, for doctors were not so numerous then as now along the path of his ceaseless journeyings. 'Began this morning,' he writes, 'to read books on *The Practice of Physic.* I want to help the bodies and souls of men.' He was a good Samaritan indeed. He read also for the improvement of his own life. He tells of reading, for example, *The Principles of Politeness,* imitated from

Chesterfield. Asbury was ever a gentleman. He constantly sought to improve himself, reading books of grammar and the like. In 1779 he writes, 'I read a few chapters in the New Testament and about seventy pages in Salmon's *Grammar.*'

To sermonic literature he seems to have been very partial. 'I have read two volumes of sermons written by Mr. Knox, of the West Indies. I esteem him as one of the best writers among the Presbyterians I have yet met with.' He characterizes these sermons as 'sublime though not deep.' He read the sermons of Isaac Watts, a conspicuous dissenting minister, whose father had been imprisoned on account of his nonconformity in the time of Charles II, and whose wife during his incarceration sat on a stone at the prison door with Isaac, then an infant, in her arms. It was this same Isaac Watts who wrote so many of the hymns which have been the inspiration and solace of multitudes of Christians for nearly two centuries, such as, 'From all that dwell below the skies,' and the beautiful evening hymn, 'Thus far the Lord hath led me on,' and those tender hymns of the suffering Saviour, 'When I survey the wondrous cross,' and 'Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,' and that stirring song of the heavenly home which is usually sung to 'Varina'—

There is a land of pure delight,
  Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
  And pleasures banish pain.

The volume which Asbury read and which must have strongly impressed him was the one entitled, *Sermons on Various Subjects, Divine and Moral,* issued in 1721. He read Sherlock's *Sermons* and Walker's *Sermons* and Taylor's *Sermons,* the last named wielding in his day a remarkable influence, and long after his death strangely moving earnest men and women who were seeking after holiness of life. Hannah More called him the 'Shakespeare of the Church,' and the Earl of Shaftesbury the 'Spenser of English theological literature.' Dr. George Rust, who preached his funeral sermon, said that he had the good humor of a gentleman, the eloquence of an orator, the fancy of a poet, the acuteness of a schoolman, the profoundness of a philosopher, the wisdom of a chancellor, the sagacity of a prophet, the reason of an angel, and the piety of a saint. He had devotion enough for the cloister, learning enough for a university, and wit enough for a college virtuosi. Judged by the remarkable effect which his *Holy Living and Holy Dying,* a book to this day widely sold, has had upon the lives of eminent men, such as Wesley and others, this eulogy seems not too extravagant. How

Asbury, with his aspirations for holiness, must have reveled in the sermons of this holy man! We find him reading also Blair's *Sermons,* where he says: 'I find some very beautiful things. His sermon on "Gentleness" is worthy the taste of Queen Charlotte, and if money were anything toward paying for knowledge, I should think that sermon worth two hundred pounds sterling, which some say the Queen gave him.' He read Saurin's *Sermons,* and Saurin was the most eloquent preacher of French Protestantism. He read most frequently, however, the sermons of his spiritual father, John Wesley. He notes that he had read Mr. Wesley's sermon on 'Riches.' 'I admire,' he says, 'the sterling truth contained in Mr. Wesley's writings on divinity, and these were largely to be found in his sermons. I have filled my intervals in reading my Bible, and the second volume of Mr. Wesley's sermons. O how I wish our preachers and people to read his *Journals,* sermons, and notes!' 'Have read in the intervals of these two days twelve of Mr. Wesley's sermons.' The fact was that he read everything that Mr. Wesley wrote that he could get hold of. 'The reading of Mr. Wesley's *Journal* has been made a particular blessing to my soul.' Of Mr. Wesley's work he says, 'There is a certain spirituality in his works which I cannot find in any other human composition.'

He read many devotional books, such as *Pilgrim's Progress,* a book more widely read to-day probably than any other book in the English language except the Bible, which has been the delight of men of literary tastes as well as of children and simple folks the world over. He carried Rutherford's letters in his saddlebags:

> I looked into Rutherford's letters, and they were blest to me; also looked into Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion,* and that was also blessed to me. My soul is waiting on the Lord for full Christian perfection. I poured out my soul to the Lord for this, and for my brethren in all parts of the world, that the power of religion may continue with us. I tremble to think of the cloud of the Divine Presence departing from us; if this should be, I hope not to live to see it; and with Mr. Wesley desire that God may rather scatter the people to the ends of the earth. I had rather they should not be than to be a dead society.

In the Journal are frequent references to Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted,* published in London in 1669, of which twenty thousand copies were sold in twelve months, and which was translated into all the European languages and one of the dialects of India. Asbury's almost constant companion was that other and better known volume of Baxter's, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest,* published in 1650, and of which Dr. Calamy says: 'This is the book for which multitudes will have cause to bless God forever.'

Under date of August 19, 1810, Asbury writes: 'Saturday—O what a prize! Baxter's *Reformed Pastor* fell into my hands this morning.' Indeed it was a prize! Richard Knill, a distinguished English missionary, said just a few hours before his death:

> If without impropriety I may refer here, as I believe I have done elsewhere, to the service which during fifty-four years I have been allowed to render to our great Master, I may declare my thankfulness in being able in some small degree to rejoice that the conversion of sinners has been my aim. I have made next to the Bible Baxter's *Reformed Pastor* my rule as regards the object of my ministry. It were well if that volume were often read by all our pastors, a study which I now earnestly recommend to them.

Another celebrated critic has said of it:

> In the whole compass of divinity there is scarcely anything superior to this valuable, practical treatise, in close pathetic appeals to the conscience of the minister of Christ upon the primary duties of his office. The main object is to press the necessity of his bringing home the truth of the gospel to every individual of his flock, by affectionate, catechetical instruction.

Among other books of devotion Asbury read, as did Wesley, *Thomas à Kempis,* and was comforted thereby. Like Wesley also, he read Law's *Serious Call,* a treatise that first awakened the religious sensibilities of Samuel Johnson, as of

John and Charles Wesley, but he makes no comment on it. His entry in his Journal is interesting from the fact that he does make comment upon another book which he read at the same time: 'I spent much of my time in reading Law's *Serious Call* and Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted,* and think the latter is one of the best pieces of human compositions in the world to awake lethargic souls of poor sinners.'

He read much biography: the *Life of Calvin;* Clark's *Life of Origen*; Burnham's *Select Martyrology and Memoirs of Dying Saints;* Fletcher's *Portrait of Saint Paul;* Judge Marshall's *Life of Washington;* Moore's *Life of Wesley;* and Whitehead's *Life of Wesley,* which shocked him: 'He is vilified; O shame!' He read more than once the *Life of David Brainerd,* that heroic missionary to the North American Indians, which was written by Jonathan Edwards, and also the *Lives* of *Halyburton, Welsh,* and *DeRenty,* which he said 'had a great tendency to quicken my soul'; Halyburton was a distinguished Scotch divine; Welsh one of the remarkable men of early Methodism; Wesley pronounced him the best Biblical scholar he knew; DeRenty a French ascetic, noted for piety, and whose Life, published in French in 1651, was abridged by John Wesley and republished. The '*Letters*' which Joseph Alleine, a Nonconformist

divine, and the author of *An Alarm to the Unconverted,* wrote from prison were an inspiration to Asbury. Besides these there are references in the Journal to biographies of various individuals less well known.

He seems to have been much interested in history, there being evidences of his having read Burnet's *History of His Own Times;* Josephus' sixteen volumes on *Universal History;* Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History;* Robertson's *History of Scotland,* which Lord Chesterfield declared was equal in eloquence and beauty to the history of Livy; Rollin's *Ancient History,* written in French and translated into several languages, which, while narrow and inaccurate and sometimes false in its deductions, nevertheless to many people in the eighteenth century formed the introduction to the study of ancient history; Winterbotham's *An Historical, Geographical, Commercial, and Philanthropic View of the United States and of the European Settlements in America and the West Indies,* published in London in 1795; Hawe's *Church History;* Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia; A History of the French Revolution;* Gordon's *History of the American Revolution;* Sewell's *History of the Quakers;* and Lee's *History of Methodism,* of which he says: 'I have seen Jesse Lee's *History* for the first time; it is better than I

expected. He has not always presented me under the most favorable aspect. We are all liable to mistakes, and I am unmoved by his.'

As I have stated, Asbury read some poetry, notably Young's *Night Thoughts,* which he regarded highly, and Thomson's *The Seasons,* of which he says: 'I find a little wheat and a great deal of chaff. I have read great authors, so called, and wondered where they found their finery of words and phrases; much of this might be pilfered from *The Seasons* without injury to the real merit of the work; and doubtless it has been plucked by literary robbers, and my wonder may cease.'

He read many other books, some of them controversial: *The Arminian Magazine,* which first appeared in 1778; Belknap's *American Biography;* Benson's *Life of Fletcher;* Berridge's *Christian World Unmasked;* Bunyan's *Holy War;* Camper, on *Ordination;* Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul;* Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections,* and also his *Work of God in New England;* Flavel's *Works;* Guyse's *Paraphrase;* Hammond's *Paraphrase and Annotations on the New Testament,* a book of which Dr. Johnson was very fond and recommended strongly; Hervey's *Dialogues*—'I have spent much of my time in reading the third volume of Mr. Hervey's Dialogues. I like his

philanthropy better than his divinity.' Some of the other books which he names are Johnson's *Apostolic Canons;* Keysler's *Travels in Switzerland;* Mason's *Self-Knowledge;* Moore's *Dialogues*—'I have read with dim eyes,' he says, 'Joseph Moore's Dialogue; it is not elegant but argumentative. It seems to have silenced the Baptists'; Sir Isaac Newton's *Observations on the Prophecies of Holy Writ;* Prince's *The Christian History, Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain and America for 1743;* Ogden, on *Revealed Religion;* Pawson's *Letters;* and Prideaux's *The Connection of the History of the Old and New Testament.*

But beyond all other books, and before all others, Asbury read the Bible. He was what Mr. Wesley exhorted his preachers to be—a man of one book. His references to the Bible may be found on almost every page of his Journal. Such entries as these are common:

> My soul is stayed on the Lord, and I find great sweetness in reading the Bible, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Other books have too great a tendency to draw us from this the best of books. I therefore intend to read more in this and less in all others. I have lately found more sweetness and delight than ever before in reading the Old Testament.

> Reading at present no other book on the Lord's

Days, I have lately read the Revelation with Mr. Wesley's notes three times through.

The study of the Holy Scriptures affords me great pleasure.

This morning I finished reading the book of Psalms, which was my regular reading this past week.

I spent much of the forenoon in prayer and read through the book of Job.

Arose, as I commonly do, before five o'clock in the morning to study the Bible. I find none like it and find it of more consequence to a preacher to know his Bible than all the languages or books in the world.

Filled my minute book, and read freely in the Bible. This book is so much hated by some. As for me, I will read it more than ever.

This morning I ended the reading my Bible through in about four months. It is hard work for me to find time for this, but all I read I owe to early rising. If I were not always to rise by five, and sometimes at four o'clock, I should have only time to eat my breakfast, pray in the family, and get ready for my journey, as I must travel every day.

The amount of writing which Asbury did is also remarkable. He was not a prolific author like Wesley. He had neither the training nor the ability for such extensive and fruitful efforts in this direction as the Oxford scholar. But that he wrote as much and as well as he did is a marvel. Consider what he had to do. Much of

his time had to be given to 'visiting.' He had to make a 'register of all the preachers on the continent who bear the name of Methodists'; 'I spent part of this week in writing and reviewing some explanatory notes on our Form of Discipline'; he had to meet the classes; 'was principally employed in assorting the books for sale'; 'went to view a spot of land for building a preaching-house upon, formed a subscription paper, and obtained subscriptions'; he had to 'make preparation' for every Conference; he had 'to prepare some parchments'; funds had to be provided for the college, therefore he must 'beg'; he had to distribute copies of the Scripture to the poor, and 'collect a little "mite money" for the preachers'; 'I laid out a plan for my travels in 1797; through Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Providence of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York, making a distance of twelve or fifteen hundred miles.' After he had been in Charleston he asked himself, 'What good have I attempted to do here?' This was his answer: 'I assisted Doctor Coke in the notes on the Discipline. I have preached every Sabbath except two; formed a plan to erect a house in the west end of the city; I have made peace between a dying man and his brother-in-law; and I cured a poor African's sore leg by applying a poultice of bread and milk.' It was all in

the day's work. Again he asked himself in the same city, 'And now what have I been doing?' He was always checking himself up to see that he did not fall below his utmost. Doing? Why, he had preached eighteen sermons, met fifteen classes—all the classes there were in the city—written more than eighty letters, read some hundred pages, visited thirty families again and again; nevertheless during his stay there he found time to write 'more than three hundred pages on subjects interesting to the society and connection.'

He had ambitions for authorship, some of which he was not able to realize. He made a collection of sermons for the preachers. He began a *Short History of the Methodists.* Three years before his death he thought to make a reprint of Baxter, and marked about three hundred pages of his *Reformed Pastor.* Asbury was a fine singer, and was interested, therefore, in the publication of a hymn book for the use of American Methodists. Moreover, he knew what a large factor hymn-singing had been in the Methodist revival. There are numerous entries in his Journal during the year 1807 indicating the work he was doing on the book. While on an episcopal tour in the West he wrote: 'Monday was diligently taken up with my pen, and prayer with my friends; the hymns for a new collection occu-

pied my mind much'; 'My companions and myself are busy compiling a new hymn book'; 'For three days past I have been busy seeking appropriate portions of Scripture for the new hymns designed to enlarge our common hymn book.' He published extracts from the works of Jeremiah Burroughs and Richard Baxter in a small volume with the title *The Causes, Evils, and Cures of Heart Divisions,* which he strongly recommended to all ministers of the gospel, and professing Christians of every denomination into whose hands it may come.' This was reprinted in 1849 with an introduction by Dr. John McClintock.

His correspondence must have been a very great burden to him, and a heavy drain upon his time. His frequent references to this phase of his activities give some idea of the extent of it. Take these entries:

Yesterday and to-day I have been busy writing long letters to my correspondents in the North.

This week I am employed in answering my correspondence in the districts of Maine, States of Massachusetts, New York, Jersey, and Virginia.

On Thursday I wrote a letter to Mrs. W., who has departed from God, and feel great peace that it may be the means of restoring her.

I arose at five o'clock, and was employed in writing letters to my friends in the Peninsula.

In the morning I wrote to Brother Garrettson to comfort him under his imprisonment.

As I cannot often meet Bishop McKendree, and, meeting, we cannot be alone for talk, I wrote a letter of counsel to him.

Yesterday and to-day I have written fifteen letters.

I have eighteen letters to answer, and more are no doubt on their way.

I wrote a small epistle to the official members of Baltimore, and another to Philadelphia, and also a pathetic letter to my parents.

I have been closely occupied in writing to Europe and to different parts of the continent.

I wrote a letter to my dear friend, Mr. Gough.

I have been employed in writing letters to the preachers.

I am crowded with letters, have much reading and writing, and the temporal concerns of the college, and the printing to attend to.

I have written to several of my ancient friends in Philadelphia. I may say of letters, as it was said of silver in the days of Solomon, 'I make no account of that.' I suppose I must write nearly a thousand in a year.

A thousand letters a year! And all else that he did! It seems inconceivable.

For some of the Bishop's very best 'writings' one must turn to the memoirs of deceased preachers in the Annual Minutes, many of which he undoubtedly wrote. They are models of con-

cise, well-balanced, just, and comprehensive life-histories. Take for example the following:

Caleb Pedicord, a man of sorrows, and, like his Master, acquainted with grief; but a man dead to the world, and much devoted to God.

George Mair, a man of affliction, but of great patience and resignation; and of excellent understanding.

John Major, a simple-hearted man, a living, loving soul, who died as he lived—full of faith and the Holy Ghost; ten years in the work, useful and blameless.

Woolman Hickson, of promising genius and considerable preaching abilities; upright in life, but soon snatched away from the work by consumption, and in the midst of his usefulness; seven years in the work.

John Cooper, fifteen years in the work, quite, inoffensive and blameless; a son of affliction, subject to dejection, sorrow, and suffering; often in want, but too modest to complain, till observed and relieved by his friends. He died in peace.

Francis Spry, a pious man, skillful and lifely in his preaching, sound in judgment, holy in his life, placid in his mind, of unshaken confidence and patience in his death; four years a laborer in the vineyard.

Wyatt Andrews, who died full of faith and the Holy Ghost. As long as he could ride he traveled; and while he had breath he praised God.

William Gill, a native of Delaware; an elder in the church, and a laborer in it for about twelve years;

blameless in life, of quick and solid parts, sound in the faith, clear in his judgment, meek in his spirit, resigned and solemnly happy in his death.

Cornelius Cook, a native of Britain; but convinced, converted, and called to preach in America. He was a faithful laborer and patient sufferer while he was employed in the church for three years; and departed in peace and confidence, in the month of August, 1789.

Aaron Hutchinson, a man of clear understanding, gospel simplicity, and godly sincerity; blameless in in his life; acceptable as a preacher; fruitful in his labors, which ended in the short space of four years. He was patient, resigned, and confident in his last moments.

His style is altogether characteristic. It is like the man—plain, direct, pointed. Now and again there is a touch of gracefulness, a play of fancy, a feeling for beauty and charm, but for the most part he has no time to indulge himself in 'fine writing,' or to adorn his thoughts in other than Quaker gray. He is far from being insensible to the beauties and marvels of the world in which he lives. The sea reminds him of its Maker; 'the eagle, with hovering wing, watching for his prey,' interests him; sweet to him are 'all the calm scenes of life, the fields and orchards bearing promise of a fruitful year; the flocks and herds, the hills and vales, and dewy meads, the gliding streams and murmuring brooks,' all

strongly appeal to him; 'thundering Niagara' awes him; the 'noble Hudson,' the 'Catskills with their towering cliffs,' and the 'lovely Shenandoah' all excite his admiration, but—the love of Christ is immeasurably greater than any mountains.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea—

and more wonderful; the power of God is more majestic than Niagara's falling flood; the conversion of a soul is a diviner miracle than the coming of spring; the fruits of the spirit are more to be coveted than the fruits of the earth's most fertile valleys; and for him 'there is a river,' nobler than the Hudson, lovelier than the Shenandoah, 'the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high,' and to these things of the spirit he gave his attention rather than to the cultivation of style in writing. Francis Asbury's greatest distinction is not as a writer but as a shepherd of souls.

CHAPTER VI

TWO REVOLUTIONS

In the town of Acton, Massachusetts, there stands a monument erected to perpetuate the name of a man born there, whose fame is forever linked with the early days of the American Revolution. Where in history is there anything finer than the story of the way in which Isaac Davis and his faithful followers forced the Concord bridge one memorable April day in 1775? 'I have not a man in my company,' cried that noble American patriot, 'who is afraid to go. It is the King's highway, and I may march upon it, if I march all the way to Boston.' It was in much the same spirit, however, and with the same sublime courage, that four years earlier another man, also born to command, entered upon his conquest of the American continent in the name of the Lord God of Hosts. Arriving in Philadelphia October 27, 1771, Francis Asbury went that very same evening to Saint George's Church, where

the people looked on us with pleasure, hardly knowing how to show their love sufficiently, bidding us

welcome with fervent affection and receiving us as angels of God. O that we may always walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called! When I came near the American shore my very heart melted within me to think from whence I came, and where I was going, and what I was going about.

From the hour he landed in America until forty-five years later, when ennobled by suffering, enriched by many experiences, now without strength to walk to the church, he is carried like a tired child at the end of a busy day and placed in a chair, and in much pain and great weakness preaches his last sermon from the text, 'For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth,' Francis Asbury, unwittingly perhaps at the first, but of fixed purpose later, did more than any other person to make the Methodist societies of the United States an American church.

This man, who wrought more deeply into American life, in its social, moral, and religious facts, than any other man who lived and acted his part in our more formative period, was an Englishman when he stepped upon these shores, and an American when he breathed out his life in 1816 in the home of his friend George Arnold. In a letter to his mother, not long after his arrival in America, he wrote, evidently with much feel-

ing, 'Old England for me.' During the war of 1812, when the presence of the British not far distant from the house where he was a guest, was referred to, he said with even greater emotion: 'They have no business here. Let them go home from whence they came. I shall pray against them with my might; that is all I can do.' [1] The passing years had wrought the change, but not time alone. Francis Asbury's earliest years in America were the stirring years of the American Revolution. They were days of storm and stress. The experiences through which Asbury passed were providentially ordered and divinely used for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Historians of the United States write of a revolution in America in the eighteenth century, but there were really *two* revolutions; for not only did the colonies become free and independent of the mother country, but the Methodist societies in America broke from the parent organization in England, and the two revolutions went forward side by side to complete success. It was inevitable that the break should come in both cases sooner or later, but the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was unquestionably hastened by the revolt of the colonies and numerous significant events during the period covered by the War for Inde-

[1] Drew MSS.

pendence. It was a momentous period both for America and Methodism, quite as determinative for the latter as the former. Had Methodism been planted in America later or earlier than it was, the Methodist Episcopal Church would probably have been in its polity and spirit altogether different from what it has been and is. Had Francis Asbury not landed on these shores just when he did, the historians of American Methodism would have had a far different story to relate. God so timed the arrival of the great ecclesiastical leader on the North American continent that he was able to take 'at the flood' that wonderful 'tide in the affairs' of the patriots and pioneers of the New World which made for national and religious progress. The contribution which the Struggle made to Asbury and through him and others to Methodism was scarcely less noteworthy than he and his coworkers made to the Nation.

A glance at those first stormy years in America will show something of what they meant to Asbury and to the Church. Immediately upon their arrival in Philadelphia Asbury and Wright began to preach, and after numerous conferences with Pilmoor they departed for their respective fields, Wright going to the eastern shore of Maryland and Asbury to New York. This was in 1771, and although mutterings of discontent

were heard among the colonists, the situation was not yet tense enough to compel the attention of the young missionary. In the providence of God he was to have time to get his work started before the storm would break. The coming of these additional preachers resulted at once in the formation of new circuits. The work for the first half of 1772 was planned on a large scale. Boardman was to enter New England, Wright to go to New York, Pilmoor was to attack the South, and Asbury to remain in Philadelphia. In the autumn of that same year word came from Wesley authorizing him to act as superintendent, and straightway the young leader set out from New York, where he was at the time, preaching as he went. In Baltimore he arranged a circuit of two hundred miles with twenty-four appointments, which was covered by him every three weeks. As he moved among the people, rapidly passing from point to point and from house to house, he heard now and again sentiments not unlike that expressed by Thomas Jefferson: 'The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time,' but he paid little attention to the kindling storm. He had his own troubles. His rigid administration of discipline had already provoked opposition. Some of his colleagues were restless under his strong hand, and from them letters of complaint had

gone to Wesley. The spirit of independence was in the air. The people chafed under anything like ecclesiastical restraint. Yet Asbury was probably correct in his diagnosis of the situation. Having been associated with Wesley in England, it seemed to him that there was need of drawing sharper, more rigid lines, and he wrote Mr. Wesley to that effect. He told him also that more workers were needed. Captain Webb, tired of having only young preachers sent to the colonies, went to England to lay the case before Wesley and to secure if possible his personal presence for America; or, if not that, at least some man of long experience and recognized standing. He seems to have persuaded Wesley that the situation in America demanded leaders of paramount ability, and Wesley, finding it impracticable to go himself to America, appointed George Shadford and Thomas Rankin, the latter a Scotchman converted under the preaching of Whitefield, who in 1761 became 'an itinerant of rare energy and commanding success,' one of the most conspicuous of Wesley's coworkers. As he was not only Asbury's senior in the itinerancy, but a superior disciplinarian, as it was supposed, Wesley made him superintendent of the American societies. Shadford was one of the most beautiful characters among the early itinerants.

One of our denominational historians thinks there is nothing in the records of early Methodism which exhibits the sublimity of the conceptions of Wesley concerning the work in America and his relation to it more dramatically than his letter to Shadford:

> DEAR GEORGE: The time is arrived for you to embark for America. You must go down to Bristol, where you will meet with T. Rankin, Captain Webb, and his wife. I let you loose, George, on the great continent of America. Publish your message in the open face of the sun, and do all the good you can. I am, dear George,
>
> Yours affectionately,
>
> JOHN WESLEY.[1]

Accompanied by another volunteer, Joseph Yearby, they arrived in Philadelphia June 3, 1773, where Asbury met them, and resigned to Rankin his temporary authority. The newcomers found plenty to do. Asbury accompanied his successor to New York, where a cheering revival rewarded Rankin's efforts, and yet where he found some things which so shocked his sense of regularity and order that six weeks after his arrival he brought the preachers together in Conference, after the manner of the Wesleyan plan, to hear Wesley's instructions and to adopt rules for a uniform government. This was the first step towards separation.

[1] Buckley, *History of Methodism in the United States*, vol. i, p. 168.

An old print of that first American Methodist Conference, which assembled July 14, 1773, shows ten clerically frocked preachers in attendance—Thomas Rankin, Francis Asbury, Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmoor, Richard Wright, George Shadford, Captain Thomas Webb, John King, Abraham Whitworth, and Joseph Yearby—all Europeans. It is an interesting coincidence that a like number attended Mr. Wesley's first Conference in England twenty-nine years previously. The several preachers made their reports, and there is evidence that Rankin was disappointed at the numerical showing. Even at this first Conference the tabulating of denominational statistics precipitated a debate. There were other discussions also. Although Lee does say that 'the preachers were much united together in love and brotherly affection,' there were serious differences of opinion and procedure. It is with evident feeling that Asbury writes:

> There were some debates among the preachers in this Conference relative to the conduct of some who had manifested a desire to abide in the cities and live like gentlemen. Three years out of four have been already spent in the cities. It was also found that money had been wasted, improper leaders appointed, and many of our rules broken.

It is not surprising that the young preacher was annoyed. He was always for a proper economy, proper leaders, and proper regard for dis-

cipline. Inflexible in ideals, in devotion to his task, and in conduct, at no point in his career could he be tolerant of anything else. Rankin spoke with plainness of the laxity of discipline and the perils of discord, and insisted that such action be taken as would bring about the establishment of genuine Wesleyan discipline. While there was at this time apparently no least thought of a separate American organization, nevertheless some things were accomplished besides the making of rules. I think it is not too much to say that this first Conference in 1773, rather than at the Christmas Conference in 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church had its birth.

The following year another Conference was held in the same city. The hopes of the leaders for better discipline and more perfect harmony during the year had not been realized. Strawbridge had shown signs of insubordination. Rankin, while utterly sincere and devoted to his work, betrayed on the one hand an ignorance of American conditions, and on the other a lack of understanding of Asbury, which bred both dissatisfaction and distrust. At this Conference, however, the very important determination was made that the preachers should exchange at the end of every six months. This was what Asbury had desired from the beginning—a circulation of preachers—and was undeniably one of the

chief means of the marvelous growth of Methodism in its first half century.

Once more the preachers meet in Philadelphia. Twelve months have passed. It is again May, and the continent is on fire. The battles of Lexington and Concord have been fought. The second Continental Congress, organized only a week before the date of this third American Conference, is still in session. The preachers are perturbed and anxious. They know not what a day may bring forth. Only Asbury seems to be sure of himself and of the future. The possibility of separation from England had been forced upon his mind. April 30, 1775, he had written: 'We have alarming military accounts from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Surely, the Lord will overrule and make all these things subservient to the spiritual welfare of his Church.' How finely this first reference in his Journal to the long conflict indicates what he regards the supreme concern of his life and his confidence in the outcome! What if there be wars and rumors of wars? His Lord will not permit the spiritual interest of the Kingdom to suffer therefrom! This was his sure anchor and that of his colleagues throughout the struggle. As will be seen later, the Methodists, and especially the preachers, were under suspicion. They were thought to be indifferent and even disloyal and traitorous;

but 'if their passion for independence was less vehement than that of others, it was because they were anxious to see men freed from the bondage of a tyrant more terrible than King George or Parliament—to break the fetters of a slavery of which all political slavery is but a consequence.' Other entries in his Journal later in 1775 confirm this:

> August 14, 1775. I spoke both morning and evening, but we were interrupted by the clamor of arms and preparations of war. My business is to be more intensely devoted to God. Then
>
> The rougher the way,
> The shorter our stay;
> The tempests that rise
> Shall gloriously hurry our souls to the skies.'
>
> October 8, 1775. Martial clamors confuse the land. However, my soul shall rest in God during this dark and cloudy day. He has his way in the whirlwind and will not fail to defend his own ark.

This must be kept in mind, namely, that when Asbury sailed from England it was not as an emigrant but as a missionary. His purpose was not to establish a home in the wilderness, but to serve the Church in the Wilderness. His motive was not selfish, but sacrificial. Having his citizenship in heaven, why should he not refuse to take the Maryland State oath of allegiance when it was demanded of him? He was in America under commission to preach the Gospel, and for

no other object. He had sworn fealty to the Lord of hosts for a work of conquest, albeit in the spiritual realm. His course of action was therefore plain. He would keep to his divinely given task, although under suspicion and suffering persecution, and even though Rankin failed to understand him and in his letters to Wesley had so biased and alarmed that great chieftain as to impel him to send a hurried communication to Asbury requiring him to return to England at once. Fortunately, Asbury was many miles distant when the letter arrived, and could not be reached. When at last Wesley's request did reach him, the relations between the two countries had become more serious, and Asbury's presence in America was an imperative necessity.

The Conference of 1776, the year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, was held in Baltimore, the first time it had assembled in that city. On account of illness Asbury was unable to be present. The session of the Conference was a solemn one. Events were now moving swiftly and inexorably. Some of Asbury's Journal entries this and the following year will give a good idea of what was transpiring:

January 30, 1776. I have been reading Burnet's *History of His Own Times*, and am amazed at the intrigues of courts and the treachery of men. There is reason to fear the same cause produces the same

effects at this time. For there is no probability of peace, and a great army is expected from England in the spring.

March 19, 1776. I received an affectionate letter from Mr. Wesley, and am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America. My desire is to live in love and peace with all men, to do them no harm but all the good I can. However, it discovers Mr. Wesley's conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived. Had he been a subject of America, no doubt he would have been as zealous and devoted to the American cause. But some inconsiderate persons have taken occasion to censure the Methodists in America on account of Mr. Wesley's political sentiments.

April 16, 1776. A friend from New York informed us that troops were raised and intrenchments made in that city. O Lord, we are oppressed; undertake for us.

November 30, 1776. It was now reported that the British troops were on their march to Philadelphia. Troubles may be at hand, but my design is through grace so to improve my time as to be always prepared for the worst.

December 12, 1776. We have many alarming accounts of martial preparation, but I leave the troubles of to-morrow until to-morrow comes. My desire is to live more to God to-day than yesterday and to be more holy this hour than the last.

January 13, 1777. We have constant rumors about the disagreeable war which is now spreading through the country, but all these things I still commit to God. Matters of greater perpetuity call for the exertion of my mental powers.

January 21, 1777 After preaching I set out and met my brethren the same night, and found them inclined to leave America and embark for England, but I had before resolved not to depart from the work on any consideration.

March 27, 1777 I received a letter from Brother Shadford intimating that, according to rule, the time was drawing near for us to return. But Saint Paul's rule is that our spiritual children should be in our hearts, to live and die with them (II Cor. 7:3). Then, doubtless, we should be willing to suffer affliction with them. May the Lord give me wisdom sufficient to direct me in this and every intricate case.

April 2, 1777. Having received information that some of my brethren had determined on their departure, I wrote to Brother Shadford that as long as I could stay and preach without injuring my conscience it appeared as my duty to abide with the flock. But I must confess Satan has harassed me with violent and various temptations.

April 21, 1777. Heard Mr. Rankin preach his last sermon. My mind was a little dejected, and I now felt some desire to return to England, but was willing to commit the matter to the Lord.

It would have been strange had he not 'felt some desire to return.' His sympathies at this time were undoubtedly with his countrymen. His relatives and friends were over the seas in the land of his birth. His English associates in the work in America were leaving him one by one. At the Conference this year, 'when the time of parting came many wept,' Asbury

records, 'as if they had lost their firstborn sons.' 'We parted,' says Garrettson, 'bathed in tears, to meet no more in this world.' 'Our hearts,' says William Watters, 'were knit together as the hearts of David and Jonathan, and we were obliged to use great violence to our feelings in tearing ourselves asunder.' It is not long after this that Asbury confesses: 'I was under some heaviness of mind, but it was no wonder. Three thousand miles from home; my friends have left me. I am considered by some as an enemy of the country, every day liable to be seized by violence and abused. However, all this is but a trifle to suffer for Christ and the salvation of souls. Lord, stand by me!' And how his Lord did stand by him! These were trying times for the English missionary, who had determined that, come what might, he would not forsake the flock committed unto him. Even at the risk of his life he was resolved to remain.

That this decision had cost him a struggle cannot be gainsaid, but that he had come to this determination shows not only a high sense of devotion to the great object which had brought him to America, but also a growing conviction as to the righteousness of the contention of the colonies.

Though I have talked much, I have kept my temper. I feel nothing but love, and no contradic-

tion I meet with makes me angry I have a natural affection for my countrymen, yet I can hear them called cruel people and calmly listen to threatenings of slaughter against them. Were a people spreading desolation with fire and sword in England, I, as an inhabitant, whether the invaders were right or wrong, would probably feel as the Americans now do, and use the same harsh expressions. Thus I reason, and cannot therefore condemn.

But though he was naturally drawn out in affection to his native land, he was even more strongly attached to the people among whom he was now working:

I received a letter from Thomas Rankin, in which he informed me that himself, Mr. Rodda, and Mr. Dempster consulted and deliberately concluded it would be best to return to England. But I can by no means agree to leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have in America. It would be an eternal dishonor to the Methodists that we should all leave the three thousand souls who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of the Good Shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger. Therefore I am determined, by the grace of God, not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may

Moreover, his unerring judgment foresaw the inevitable outcome. Lednum tells of a letter which Asbury wrote to Rankin the year that Rankin returned to England, in which he expressed his belief that the Americans would become a free and independent nation, and declared that he was too much knit in affection

to many of them to leave them, and that Methodist preachers had a great work to do under God in America. The letter fell into the hands of the authorities in America, and produced a change in their feelings toward him and toward his fellow Methodists.

But before this change took place there was much suffering. Nor was it without good reason that the American patriots who were contending for 'liberty or death' regarded the Methodists with suspicion. The leaders of the Methodist movement in the colonies were Englishmen. The commanding genius of the Evangelical Revival in England, John Wesley, had, as Asbury hinted in his Journal, dabbled in the politics of the two countries. His *Calm Address to the American Colonies,* in which he boldly restated with few changes Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny,* had created a general prejudice against his adherents in America. Moreover several of the preachers also were indiscreet. Rankin spoke so freely and imprudently on public affairs as to cause fear that his influence would be dangerous to the American cause. Rodda was so unwise as to distribute copies of the King's proclamation, and left the country under circumstances unfavorable to his reputation and hurtful to the interests of religion. Wesley's pamphlet, *Calm Address,* which

had a wide sale, forty thousand copies having been disposed of in twenty days, made it evident that the societies in America could not continue in relation to the English societies should the outcome of the war be favorable to the American colonies. When the times were about at their worst Shadford returned to England, and, indeed, two years after the Declaration of Independence not an English preacher remained in America except Asbury. It was freely asserted that the Methodist body was a Tory propaganda, though there was no proof to establish the contention. In New York the leading members were thorough Loyalists. Elsewhere the membership was divided in political sentiment, as were all communities at the time. But the prejudice against the Methodists was pronounced. Judge White was arrested on the charge of being a Methodist and presumptively a Tory. The native ministers who had been raised up—Watters, Gatch, Garrettson, Morrell, and Ware—were true-hearted Americans, and while the moral views and conscientious scruples of some of these and many other Methodists were not on principle favorable to war, they were consistently loyal. Notwithstanding this, many of them suffered persecution. Caleb Pedicord was cruelly whipped, and carried his scars to the grave. Freeborn Garrettson was

beaten to insensibility, and on another occasion thrust into jail, as were also Joseph Hartley, one of the traveling preachers of Virginia, Wren, and Forrest. Other preachers were tarred and feathered. For two years Asbury, having refused to take the Maryland State oath, was a refugee in another State. As Lee quaintly says,

> On the fifth of March Mr. Asbury began to lye by at Thomas White's, in the Delaware State, where he shut himself up. . . . Notwithstanding Mr. Asbury was shut up in a friend's house, he looked forward, and hoped for the time to come when he might again visit his brethren, and be of some service to the scattered flock, among whom he had laboured almost seven years.

This period of retirement was as valuable to Asbury as the desert experience of John the Baptist or Paul's stay in Arabia, and it was as much in the order of Divine Providence. He himself seems to have had this belief: 'I formerly thought it would be death to me to keep silence from declaring the word of God, but now I am in a measure contented. It appears to be the will of God that I should be silent for a season, to prepare me for further usefulness hereafter. Therefore my time shall be employed to the best advantage.' And he did spend 'these perilous days in retirement, devotion, and study.' It has been asserted that Asbury was in personal danger

during his stay at Judge White's; and while on one occasion, a report having become current which inclined him to think it would be prudent for him 'to move the next day,' and, accordingly, he 'set out after dinner and lay in a swamp until about sunset,' during which time he thought of himself as 'like some of the old prophets who were concealed in times of public distress,' most of the time he felt himself at liberty to go about among the people and preach as he found opportunity. In 1804, twenty-five years after this retirement in Delaware, Asbury said in a letter to Zachary Myles, a layman in Baltimore:

I have observed an error in Mr. Almore's performance of my concealment in the State of Delaware. That was at Judge White's, whose son is now a senator in Congress. It is a mistake. I had access to the house of Governor Rodney and Bassett, and Dr. Magaw's. I went where I thought fit in every part of the State, frequently lodged in the houses of very reputable people of the world, and we had a great work. I think near eighteen hundred were added in that State during my stay of about twenty months. I suppose Dr. Coke received some misinformation, as he was hasty. Notwithstanding I took no State oath, first or last, no one molested me.[1]

It was a great relief to him, however, when he could go afield again, as he was able to do after about two years in Delaware, returning to

[1] Drew MSS.

Maryland for the Conference in Lovely Lane Church, Baltimore, April, 1780.

This year, as the year previous, two Conferences were held. In 1779, inasmuch as Asbury could not go to the Conference, the Conference went to him, at least part of it, sixteen of the Northern preachers assembling at the home of Judge White April 28. Dr. Faulkner, one of American Methodism's greatest historians, says that this Conference was dominated by Asbury, and that his stern hand is seen in the pledge that the preachers shall take the 'station this Conference shall place them in and continue till the next Conference,' and especially in his 'virtual self-appointment as superintendent in a session of a minority of the preachers,' his authority to be absolute. 'How far will his power extend? On hearing every preacher for and against what is in debate, the right of determination shall rest with him, according to the Minutes.' Dr. Faulkner thinks that when one considers all the circumstances this assumption of authority 'is not a pleasing act to contemplate,' though he admits that it is in strict keeping of the Wesleyan movement, the Conference in England being John Wesley, nothing more, nothing less.'[1] But whether pleasing or no, this assumption by Asbury of like authority for America seems to indi-

[1] Faulkner, *The Methodists*, pp. 67–69.

cate beyond a shadow of a doubt that Asbury, during those months of study and reflection at Judge White's, had arrived at the conclusion that separation from Mr. Wesley was inevitable, and that a new organization of the societies in America must be effected. This is the most significant fact of that assumption of authority; Wesley was supreme in Great Britain; Asbury would have like relation to the Methodists in America.

In spite of the war, new circuits had been established and the membership was steadily increasing. The people were asking that the sacraments might be administered to them, and some of the leading preachers were determined not to withhold them. The spirit of revolt was manifest among the Methodists as among the colonists. By the exercise of limitless patience and much tact and through continuing prayer, Asbury succeeded in averting a schism among the Methodists, he himself being the bond which held the societies together until the freedom of the colonies having been sealed by the treaty of peace with England in 1783, the formation of a new church organization was now only a question of time. Nor could it be delayed.

The Revolutionary war being now closed, and a general peace established, we could go into all parts of the country without fear; and we soon began to

> enlarge our borders, and to preach in many places where we had not been before. We soon saw the fruit of our labors in the new circuits, and in various parts of the country, even in old places where we had preached in former years with but little success. One thing in particular that opened the way for the spreading of the gospel by our preachers was this: during the war, which had continued seven or eight years, many of the members of our societies had, through fear, necessity, or choice, moved into the back settlements, and into new parts of the country; and as soon as the national peace was settled, and the way was open, they solicited us to come among them; and by their earnest and frequent petitions, both verbal and written, we were prevailed on, and encouraged to go among them; and they were ready to receive us with open hands and willing hearts, and to cry out, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' The Lord prospered us much in the thinly settled parts of the country, where, by collecting together the old members of our society, and by joining some new ones with them, the work greatly revived, and the heavenly flame of religion spread far and wide.[1]

The hour was at hand for the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. The divinely chosen leader of the new church, the Moses of American Methodism, set apart by the great Head of the Church for the important task, disciplined by solitude and suffering, through more than a decade of unselfish labors in America having imbibed the American spirit, was ready

[1] Lee, *History of the Methodists*, pp. 84, 85.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 18, 1784, there sailed from England for America 'a commissioner with extraordinary powers.' He was accompanied by two missionaries, Richard Whatcoat, who had been a friend and companion of Francis Asbury in England, and Thomas Vasey, and bore with him a certificate given under John Wesley's hand and seal, and reading as follows:

To all to whom these presents shall come, John Wesley, late Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford, Presbyter of the Church of England, sendeth greetings:

Whereas, many of the people of the Southern provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, according to the usages of the same Church: and, whereas, there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers:

Know all men, that I, John Wesley, think myself to be providentially called at this time to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And, therefore, under the protection of Almighty

God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as a Superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, a Presbyter of the Church of England, and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

This document was the Magna Charta of American Methodism, the earnest of the independence of the Wesleyan societies in the United States. The problem of the oversight of the Methodists in America now that, as he says in a letter addressed to 'our brethren in North America' and sent over with Coke to be printed and circulated among the societies upon his arrival in America, 'by a very uncommon train of providences many of the provinces of North America are totally disjointed from the mother country,' was as difficult as any he had faced during his long and eventful career. But having considered it in all its relations, he met it in a worthy way. In February, 1784, he called into his private room in City Road, London, one of his most trusted preachers and counselors, Thomas Coke, to whom he spoke somewhat as follows: 'That, as the Revolution in America had

separated the United States from the mother country forever, and the Episcopal Establishment was utterly abolished, the societies had been represented to him as in a most deplorable condition; that an appeal had also been made to him through Asbury, in which he was requested to provide for them some mode of church government suited to their exigencies, and that having long and seriously resolved the subject in his thoughts, he intended to adopt the plan which he was now about to unfold; that, as he had invariably endeavored in every step he had taken to keep as closely to the Bible as possible, so, in the present occasion, he hoped he was not about to deviate from it; that, keeping his eye upon the conduct of the primitive churches in the ages of unadulterated Christianity, he had much admired the mode of ordaining bishops which the church of Alexandria had practiced, and finally, that, being himself a presbyter, he wished Coke to accept ordination from his hands, and to proceed in that character to the continent of America, to superintend the societies in the United States.' [1] Coke very naturally demurred, but Wesley's mind was fully made up, and he overcame Coke's objections. Thereupon he wrote in his *Journal:* 'On Wednesday, September 1st, being now clear in my own mind, I took a step which I had

[1] Drew, *Life of Coke,* pp. 63, 64.

long weighed, and appointed three of our brethren to go and serve the desolate sheep in America, which I verily believe will be much to the glory of God.' The following day he set apart by the laying on of his hands Thomas Coke to be a superintendent in America, and assisted by Coke and the Rev. James Creighton, each of them being a presbyter of the Church of England, ordained Whatcoat and Vasey presbyters for America. This was a most radical step, but Wesley could see no other way. 'If anyone will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding these poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it,' he wrote. 'At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.'

Anxious, however, that the grounds on which he had reached his conclusion should be fully understood, Wesley, in the letter referred to above, says among other things:

> Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me, many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our traveling preachers. But I have still refused; not only for peace's sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national Church to which I belonged.
>
> But the case is widely different between England

and North America. Here there are bishops, who have a legal jurisdiction; in America there are none, neither any parish minister; so that for some hundreds of miles together there is none either to baptize, or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending laborers into the harvest.

I have, accordingly, appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted national Church in the world), which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's Day in all congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day.

. . . .

It has, indeed, been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to this I object: (1) I desired the Bishop of London to ordain one, but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would expect to govern them; and how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the

other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.[1]

Wesley's three commissioners landed in New York on November 3, 1784, and went to the residence of Stephen Sands, a trustee of John Street Church. That night and several following days Coke preached, and then left for Philadelphia. In Delaware he was the guest of Judge Bassett, where on Sunday, November 14, he met Freeborn Garrettson, and repaired with him to a chapel in the midst of the forest, Barratt's Chapel, the first erected in Delaware and still in use, finding there a great company of people, to whom he preached. Afterward he administered the Lord's Supper to more than five hundred. It was a Quarterly Meeting, and fifteen preachers were present. Drew, Coke's biographer, tells of what occurred after the sermon in this fashion:

Scarcely, however, had he finished his sermon, before he perceived a plainly dressed, robust, but venerable-looking man, moving through the congregation, and making his way toward him. On ascending the pulpit, he clasped the Doctor in his arms; and, without making himself known by words, accosted him with the holy salutation of primitive Christianity. That venerable man was Mr. Asbury.[2]

[1] *Methodist Magazine*, 1785, p. 602.
[2] Drew, *Life of Coke*, p. 92.

This first meeting of Asbury and Coke is one of the dramatic scenes in the history of the Methodist movement. 'How different were the men who fell into each other's arms at Barratt's Chapel on November 14, 1784—Thomas Coke, the only child of a wealthy house, and Francis Asbury, the only son of an English gardener! The one an Oxford graduate; the other the self-taught scholar of a frontier world. Coke, impulsive, fluent, rhetorical; Asbury, reticent, pithy, of few words, but mighty in speech when stirred by a great theme, a great occasion, or the inrushings of the Holy Spirit. Coke's mind was as mobile as his character was stable. Asbury's conclusions matured of themselves, and, once formed, were as steadfast as his love for Christ. Coke could never separate himself wholly from England; Asbury could never separate himself from America. Coke crossed the Atlantic eighteen times; Asbury never crossed it but once, not even to see his aged mother, for whose comfort he would have sold his last shirt and parted with his last dollar. Coke founded missions in the West Indies, in Africa, in Asia, in England, in Wales, in Ireland; Asbury took one continent for his own, and left the impress of his colossal nature upon every community within its borders. Coke was rich, and gave generously of his abundance; out of poverty Asbury sup-



BARRATT'S CHAPEL—INTERIOR
Showing old altar rail, and the pulpit where Coke and Asbury met for the first time in America



BARRATT'S CHAPEL
One of the oldest Methodist Churches in America, situated near Frederica, Delaware

ported his aged parents, smoothed the declining years of the widow of John Dickins, helped the poor encountered on his ceaseless journeys, and at last gave to the Church the legacies intended for his comfort by loving friends. Coke was twice married; Asbury refused to bind a woman to his life of sacrifice, and the man whom little children ran to kiss and hug was buried in a childless grave. Both were loved; both were at times misunderstood; both were sharply dealt with by some of their dearest friends; but Asbury was not only opposed and rebuked, he was vilified and traduced. Neither shrank from danger nor from hardships; but Asbury's life was continuous hardship, until at last rest itself could yield him no repose. A sort of spiritual Cromwell, compelling obedience at every cost to himself as well as others, Asbury could have broken his mother's heart to serve the cause for which he died daily. Coke lies buried beneath the waves he crossed so often; but around the tomb of Asbury beat continually the surges of an ever-increasing human life, whose endless agitations shall feel, until the end of time, the shapings of his invisible, immortal hands.'[1] Asbury's own account of this memorable hour is as follows:

November 14. I came to Barratt's Chapel. Here,

[1] Little, *Proceedings of the Centennial Methodist Conference*, pp. 218, 219.

to my great joy, I met those dear men of God, Doctor Coke and Richard Whatcoat. We were greatly comforted together. The Doctor preached on 'Christ, our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.' Having had no opportunity of conversing with them before public worship, I was greatly surprised to see Brother Whatcoat assist by taking the cup in the administration of the sacrament. I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country It may be of God.

But, like Wesley, this man also was of an open mind, and sought only to know his Lord's will.

It may be doubted whether Coke had thought to call together the preachers in Conference. Wesley evidently had not authorized him to do so. What need was there for a Conference? Had not he, as supreme in leadership of the Methodists everywhere, *appointed* Coke and Asbury to be joint superintendents in North America? And Coke, who had come with two elders to ordain Asbury a superintendent, could have done this in private at Judge Bassett's or any other place. But Asbury would not have it so. He had been in America thirteen years; he had witnessed the stirring struggle for American independence; he had imbibed the spirit of democracy, and knew not only that taxation without representation was tyranny, but some other things also. And he could not consent to the proposals of Mr. Wesley until they had been con-

sidered by the preachers in Conference. Moreover, he himself was not yet fully prepared in his own mind to accept ordination. He was now forty years of age, and more than half of his life had been spent in preaching; but up to this time he had not been ordained. Neither in England nor America had he ever administered the sacraments. He was a member of the Church of England, and had himself received the sacraments at the hands of the ministers of that church. When the preachers in Virginia were determined to administer the sacraments he stood out against them, 'and now he was startled with a proposition that he who would not even administer the sacrament of baptism because he was not ordained by a bishop should consent to take ordination as a bishop. He was not at all misled by the use of what seemed to be the less offensive term of "superintendent" instead of "bishop." He knew well that he was to do in America all that a bishop did in England, and while he might not have the name, he certainly was to have the office of bishop.' [1]

He therefore insisted that a Conference be called, and Coke yielded. The place and date for the Conference were fixed, and Freeborn Garrettson was sent 'like an arrow' to summon the preachers. Asbury wanted Coke to know

[1] Smith, *Life of Francis Asbury*, pp. 74, 75.

something of the societies over which he had been appointed overseer, and drew up for him a route of about one thousand miles, to be traversed in the six weeks intervening before the Conference which had been agreed upon, while he, accompanied by Whatcoat and Vasey, continued his journey over the western shore of Maryland. The entries in his Journal show he was seeking for knowledge of God's will:

November 26. I observed this day as a day of fasting and prayer, that I might know the will of God in the matter that is shortly to come before our Conference. The preachers and people seem to be much pleased with the projected plan. I myself am led to think it is of the Lord. My soul waits upon God. O that he may lead us in the way we should go! Part of my time is, and must necessarily be, taken up with preparing for Conference.

December 14. I met Doctor Coke at Abingdon, Mr. Richard Dallam kindly taking him there in his coach. He preached on 'He that hath the Son hath life.' We talked of our concerns in great love.

December 15. My soul was much blessed at the communion, where I believe all were more or less engaged with God. I feel it necessary to give up my own will.

From Abingdon they came to Perry Hall, some twelve miles from Baltimore, the home of Henry Dorsey Gough, who had become a member of the Methodist Society in 1775. He was a man of large wealth, and his spacious mansion was for

years both a preaching place and a haven of rest for the itinerants.

On Friday, December 24, 1784, the guests of Perry Hall rode into Baltimore. They were serious, for they were about to engage in the most important Conference of Methodist preachers ever held in America; confident of divine guidance, for hitherto had Jehovah helped them; audacious, because a continent, now free, stretched out before them to be taken for Christ. At ten o'clock the first session of the Christmas Conference assembled. Coke as Wesley's representative was in the chair. Of a total of eighty or more preachers, nearly sixty were present, but, unfortunately, the names of twenty-nine only are known. Of these Asbury and Coke are the outstanding figures, and the former clearly the dominant force. Thomas Ware, who was present, at first was not pleased with Coke's appearance. 'His stature, complexion, and voice resembled that of a woman rather than of a man; and his manners were too courtly for me. So unlike was he to the grave and, as I conceived, apostolic Asbury that his appearance did not prepossess me favorably.' Those were sturdy pioneers in that Conference where the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, men who hated anything like effeminacy, and it is evident that Coke was not the type of a man to make the

strongest appeal to them. Asbury was. They would have no other leader. For him they would die. They welcomed Coke, they accepted his superintendency, partly because they had come to see in him, as Ware said, so many things to admire that they no longer marveled at Mr. Wesley's selection of him to serve as superintendent, but chiefly because of his outspoken appreciation of his associate. 'In the presence of Mr. Asbury I feel myself a child. He is in my estimation the most apostolic man I ever saw, except Mr. Wesley,' but the American preachers did not make even that exception. They revered Wesley as the father and founder of Methodism, but Asbury was their chieftain-leader, trusted and beloved.

Among the others present at this Christmas Conference were Whatcoat and Vasey, accredited messengers of Wesley; Freeborn Garrettson, 'the herald of the Conference'; William Watters, with Asbury the only link between the first Conference of preachers in 1773 and this gathering of itinerants; Reuben Ellis, 'an excellent counselor and steady yokefellow in Jesus'; Edward Dromgoole, an Irishman, and a converted Romanist, a trophy of John King's zeal; William Gill, eagle-eyed, unequaled as a conversationalist, pronounced by Dr. Benjamin Rush, the eminent physician, 'the greatest

divine he had ever heard'; Thomas Ware, afterward a founder of the denomination in New Jersey and a successful preacher for a half century; William Black, who began Methodism in Nova Scotia, and was now looking for additional missionaries for that province; Francis Porthyress, who the year previous had borne the standard across the Alleghenies; Joseph Everett, 'the roughest-spoken preacher that ever stood in the itinerant ranks'; LeRoy Cole, who was to live long, preach much, and do much good; Richard Ivey, another Virginian; William Glendenning, an erratic Scotchman; Nelson Reed, small of stature, but mighty in spirit; James O'Kelly, then a most laborious and popular evangelist, but later a rebellious controversialist; John Haggerty, able to preach in both English and German; Jeremiah Lambert, to receive at this Conference an appointment to the island of Antigua; John Dickins, one of the ablest scholars of early Methodism, and of whom Asbury says in his journal, 'For piety, probity, profitable preaching, holy living, Christian education of his children, secret prayer, I doubt whether his superior is to be found either in Europe or America'; James O. Cromwell, who was to be ordained as a missionary with Garrettson to Nova Scotia, and who had come to plead for assistance; Ira Ellis, 'of undissembled sincerity, great modesty,

deep fidelity, great ingenuity, and uncommon power of reasoning'; William Phœbus, preacher, physician, and editor; Lemuel Green, a clear, sound, useful preacher; Caleb Boyer and Ignatius Pigman, 'the former the Saint Paul and the latter the Apollos of the denomination'; John Smith, of delicate constitution, yet abundant in journeyings and labors; and Jonathan Forrest, who, like Garrettson and others, had his share of persecutions and prison experiences, and who was to be privileged to see the Church which in this historic assembly he helped to found, increase from about fifteen thousand members to a million, and from eighty or more traveling preachers to over four thousand.

There were some of the prominent itinerants who were absent. Jesse Lee was absent. He had received notice of the proposed gathering, but he was five hundred miles distant from Baltimore, in a poor state of health, and the season of the year was most unfavorable for traveling. At this time Lee was twenty-seven years of age, and then, as always, of strong opinions and prejudices. Whether his presence at the Christmas Conference would have changed or modified any of the conclusions reached is an interesting question. His biographer, Minton Thrift, relates that the first interview Lee and Asbury had after the Christmas Conference was at a

Colonel Hendron's where Bishop Asbury preached.

Just before the commencement of divine service Asbury made his appearance having on his black gown, cassock, and bands. Mr. Lee was so far from being pleased at seeing the superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in this attire that he absolutely felt himself grieved on account of what he deemed an innovation upon that plainness and simplicity which had always been characteristic of the Methodists in America, and he concluded that these appendages would have an appearance too imposing upon the people generally, not perhaps recollecting at that time that Mr. Asbury in this respect only followed the example of Wesley himself.

John Tunnell and Caleb Pedicord were also absent. They had been present at the Baltimore Conference in May of this year, the last of the early Annual Conferences to be held, and the first to be attended by Thomas Ware, who nearly a half century later wrote his impressions of the men of 1784, who though young appeared to him to be even then 'wayworn and weather-beaten into premature old age.' His description of these two men whose names are not among those known to have been at the Christmas Conference, and who together with Gill, in his opinion, stood next to Asbury in the estimation of thousands, is so fine that, there being the possibility that they may have been among those who took part in the deliberations of this epochal Conference, it is

worthy of a place in every account of the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Tunnell and Gill were both defective in physical powers. Pedicord was surcharged with the dew of sensibility: but they were all children of nature, not of art; and especially Pedicord and Tunnell. A sailor one day chanced to pass by where Tunnell was preaching, stopped a considerable time to listen, and was observed to be much affected. He then went to his companions, and said: 'I have been listening to a man who has been dead, and has been to heaven. He is now returned, and is telling the people all about the other world,' and declared he had never been so much affected with anything he ever saw or heard.

And truly, to see Tunnell, who generally very much resembled a dead man, and hear him, with a strong, musical voice, pour forth a flood of heavenly eloquence, which he frequently did, it would seem as if he were a messenger from the invisible world. I have heard his auditors say, 'The face of Tunnell shone to-day as the face of an angel.'

Pedicord was handsomely formed. His countenance bespoke intelligence and much sensibility. His voice was soft, and remarkably plaintive; and he had the art of touching his hearers at once. I have seen the tear start, and the head fall, before he had uttered three sentences, which were generally sententious. Nor did he raise expectations to disappoint them. And if he could not, like Tunnell, bind his auditors with chains of adamant, he could draw them after him with cords of silk. Never was a man, in our parts, more tenderly beloved than he: and had the umpirage been left to me which of the three was preeminent, I should have said—there was none like Pedicord—but—*he was my spiritual father*.[1]

[1] *Methodist Quarterly*, 1831, pp. 102, 103.

When the devotional exercises were over, Coke told his associates of Wesley's wishes and plans, and the formal organization of the Church was taken up. Rarely has so important a task been accomplished with such comparative ease. Everything was ready; the urgency of the matter was evident, the form had been agreed upon, and little more than a resolution was required. Such a resolution was offered by John Dickins, the Eton scholar, which was adopted by a unanimous vote, and the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America came into existence. Asbury declined the appointment by Wesley as superintendent, refusing to submit to ordination unless the Conference should elect him to the position, and 'when it was put to vote he was unanimously chosen,' as was also Thomas Coke. On the second day of the Conference, Christmas Day, Asbury was ordained deacon by Coke, assisted by Whatcoat and Vasey; the following day he was ordained elder, and on Monday he was consecrated superintendent. At this service the Rev. Philip Otterbein, a German minister, Asbury's admirer and friend, assisted the others. The Conference adopted the first *Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* which 'was substantially the same with the *Large Minutes,* the principal alterations being only such as were necessary to adapt it to

the state of things in America.'[1] The account given by Ware is so admirable and so informing that it is here inserted:

At the Christmas Conference we met to congratulate each other, and to praise the Lord that he had disposed the mind of our excellent Wesley to renounce the fable of uninterrupted succession, and prepare the way for furnishing us with the long-desired privileges we were thenceforward expecting to enjoy. The announcement of the plan devised by him for our organization as a Church filled us with solemn delight. . . . We, therefore, according to the best of our knowledge, received and followed the advice of Mr. Wesley, as stated in our Form of Discipline. After Mr. Wesley's letter, declaring his appointment of Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury joint superintendents over the Methodists in America had been read, analyzed, and cordially approved by the Conference, the question arose, 'What name or title shall we take?' I thought to myself, 'I shall be satisfied that we be denominated "The Methodist Church," ' and so whispered to a brother sitting near me. But one proposed—I think it was John Dickins—that we should adopt the title of 'Methodist Episcopal Church.' Mr. Dickins was, in the estimation of his brethren, a man of sound sense and sterling piety, and there were few men on the Conference floor heard with greater deference than he. Most of the preachers had been brought up in what was called 'The Church of England'; and, all agreeing that the plan of general superintendence, which had been adopted, was a species of episcopacy, the motion on Mr. Dickins' suggestion was carried without, I think, a dissenting voice. There was not, to my

[1] Emory, *History of the Discipline,* p. 25.



CONSECRATION OF FRANCIS ASBURY AS A BISHOP OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

recollection, the least agitation on the question. Had the Conference indulged a suspicion that the name they adopted would be, in the least degree, offensive to the views or feelings of Mr. Wesley, they would have abandoned it at once, for the name of Mr. Wesley was inexpressibly dear to the Christmas Conference, and especially to Mr. Asbury and Dr. Coke.[1]

After having been in session ten days, during which Coke preached every day at noon and others of the preachers morning and evening, the Conference closed 'in great peace and unanimity.' The action of the Conference in organizing the Church was well received. Lee says: 'The Methodists were pretty generally pleased at our becoming a Church, and heartily united together in the plan which the Conference had adopted, and from that time religion greatly revived.' Watters wrote: 'We became, instead of a religious society, a separate Church. This gave great satisfaction through all our societies.' Ezekiel Cooper gives this testimony: 'This step met with general approbation, both among the preachers and members. Perhaps we seldom find such unanimity of sentiment upon any question of such magnitude.'

Upon the adjournment of the Christmas Conference Coke journeyed northward, spending five months in the States and laboring incessantly.

[1] *Life of Thomas Ware*, pp. 105, 106.

Bishop Asbury's first episcopal tour was an extended one. Leaving Baltimore, he reached Fairfax, Virginia, January 4, 1785, crossed the State, and entered North Carolina, January 20; preached at Salisbury, North Carolina, February 10; Charleston, South Carolina, February 24; Wilmington, North Carolina, March 19; and reached the home of Green Hill April 19, where was held the first Annual Conference of the newly organized Church. He arrived at Yorktown, Virginia, May 12; Mount Vernon, May 26, where he and Bishop Coke called upon George Washington, 'who received them very politely and gave them his opinion against slavery.' June 1 he was again in Baltimore for the Conference, and as Bishop Coke was to sail for Europe the next day, they sat together until midnight. Upon reaching Europe Coke was attacked by Charles Wesley for some of his official acts at Baltimore and elsewhere, and though he was completely vindicated by John Wesley, it is evident that he went further in the way of separation from the Church of England than Wesley had intended. But Asbury and the native American preachers were far better judges of what the situation in America required than Mr. Wesley, more than eighty years of age and three thousand miles away, could possibly be. Asbury undoubtedly exercised a determining influence

in the modification of Wesley's plan, Coke giving way to the stronger personality.

There are some things in the subsequent relations of Coke to Asbury which I find difficult to explain save on the premise that he recognized the superior administrative ability of his colleague. For Asbury, Coke professed the profoundest regard. In a letter, dated Southampton, England, August 10, 1787, and brought over by Mr. Heath, when he came to take charge of Cokesbury College, Coke declared:

> All I am and have is at the command of my American brethren and you as far as I can serve you. . Will you believe me, you may command me, you may confide in me with the fullest confidence, you may depend upon it (and may my repeated written testimonies testify against me if I ever prove false) that I am jealous of everything that may in any degree hurt your usefulness, because I believe God is [with you] and because I love you.[1]

The story of Coke's relations to Asbury and to American Methodism has some strange chapters. LeRoy M. Lee, a nephew of Jesse Lee, and his biographer, in a letter to the Rev. Robert Emory, inclosing a letter of Devereux Jarratt, which he thought, although it had no address, had been written to Dr. Coke, adds: 'By the way, was not the Doctor a queer little man? You recollect a

[1] Drew MSS.

British officer said he was the most heavenly minded little devil he had ever seen. He was a creature of strong and strange impulses certainly.'[1] But he will ever be held in grateful remembrance by American Methodists. He came as an ambassador, with unusual powers; he was present when the American societies were declared independent and the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church was effected; he, with the assistance of others, established our episcopacy, ordaining Francis Asbury a superintendent, and for this and for his subsequent labors in America and elsewhere he deservedly holds a high place among the Fathers.

Concerning Wesley's purpose when he ordained Coke for America, there have been serious differences of opinion. This is not the place, however, to discuss such questions, as to whether Wesley intended to institute episcopacy or to organize an independent Church, or as to the validity of his ordination of Coke; nor is it of importance now whether Coke faithfully carried out the instructions given him by Wesley. The results long since justified his action. But this, at least, may be said, that while Wesley may not have ordained Coke, or desired that Asbury should be ordained to the episcopacy after the manner of the English bishops, he did design

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

that they should be made bishops in the sense of presbyters consecrated to the office of general superintendence.[1] Moreover, the ordination which both Coke and Asbury received was in every essential sense a valid ordination. It was so regarded both in England and America. Dr. John Emory at the British Conference in Liverpool in 1820 heard the learned Adam Clarke and Richard Watson, the theologian, publicly express their convictions that the American episcopacy was a true, actual, scriptural episcopacy of the most genuine and apostolical character. And this is the proposition successfully defended by Dr. Emory himself in his *Defense of Our Fathers and of the Original Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* In the paper which Dr. John Miley read at the Centennial Methodist Conference in Baltimore in 1884, on *The Work of the Christmas Conference,* are these ringing sentences: 'And if any, with haughty air and the vain conceit of a crushing logic, still demand where the Methodists got their episcopacy, the true and sufficient answer is, by the good will of God they got it from themselves. This they did; and no church has a better or more valid episcopacy.'[2]

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[1] Faulkner, *The Methodists,* p. 97.
[2] *Proceedings Centennial Methodist Conference,* p. 118.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LONG ROAD

'The Rev.[d] Bishop Asbury, North America' was the way Bishop Coke addressed a letter in August, 1787, to his colleague in America. Had Edward Everett Hale only known, he might have written a companion story to his ***The Man Without a Country,*** and of equal pathos. It would have been the story of the life of Francis Asbury—The Man Without a Home. Several times in his Journal Asbury writes that he is tired and going home. Home? But where was this itinerant preacher's home? Once when entering the prairies of Ohio, a stranger met Asbury, and abruptly inquired, 'Where are you from?' 'From Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or almost any place you please'; and this was literally true. He was an itinerant, the greatest itinerant of the Christian centuries. His home was 'on the road.' He had no other. When he came to America he rented no house, he hired no lodgings, he made no arrangements to board anywhere, but simply set out upon the Long Road, and was still traveling forty-five

years later when Death finally caught up with him. What a stern chase it was, that this tireless traveler led him for nearly a half century! But what a reputation it gained for Asbury! When after a number of years he preached in Washington, he found that nearly every person in the community was in the audience, come together to hear '*this man that rambles through the United States.*' He had well earned this distinction. 'I am always on the wing,' he said, and added, as if half apologizing, 'but it is for God.' 'I am always upon the run,' he said another time, 'though kept in peace,' as if to forestall sympathy. Asbury loved the Road, as another man would love his home. 'I have traveled so much that it seems like confinement to rest one day; I hope I shall travel as long as I live; traveling is my health, life and all, for soul and body.' He exceeded Wesley in his annual travels. As Saint Francis of Assisi took Poverty for his bride, Francis Asbury espoused the Road. No man ever gave himself in completer devotion to the wife of his hearthstone than did he to this, the Lady of his chaste love. It was not *wanderlust* which urged him from place to place, nor was it any passion of discontent. There is a spirit of restlessness which makes pioneers and heroes and travelers, such a spirit as peopled the New England shores, and sent men to the glad rivers

of Virginia, and drove them beyond the frontiers of civilization; but it was not this which led Asbury to make the Road his bride. Moreover, it was not love of travel—travel was ever irksome to him—which kept him for nearly a half century on the Road, but love of the man who lived by the side of the Road. It was while listening to the priest read the lesson of the day that Francis of Assisi, worshiping in the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, heard his call to the Road. The day was the festival of Saint Matthias, February 24, 1209, and the lesson was from Saint Matthew's Gospel, the tenth chapter, the account of the sending out of the twelve disciples. As this sounded in his ears Saint Francis lost sight of the reader, and saw 'no man save Jesus only,' and saw him standing with finger pointing to the highways and byways of life, and taking his shoes from off his feet and throwing down his purse and staff, he set out upon that journey of poverty and self-denial and obedience to the letter of Christ's command, which made him the most conspicuous figure of the thirteenth century. Less dramatic but fully as peremptory was Asbury's summons to the Long Road. It was while standing at the forge that he heard the arresting Voice, 'Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and as ye go preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand; heal the sick,

cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give'; and dropping the hammer, and laying aside his leather apron, he set out upon an itinerant career unparalleled in the history of American Christianity, the Prophet and Shepherd of the Long Road.

Whatever else Christianity has accomplished, it has produced great travelers. The itinerant preacher is in apostolic succession. Samuel traveled a circuit. Christ's disciples had no abiding place. Paul was 'in journeyings oft.' The conspicuous religious movements of Christian history have centered about an itinerant ministry. Time and again has the Church been awakened and saved by wandering preachers. It was through the labors of itinerant preachers that the Catholic Revival of the Middle Ages was brought about. The great Reformation of Christianity in the sixteenth century, of which John Wycliffe was 'the morning star,' was heralded by the preaching of itinerants. Four hundred years later another Oxford man again saved Christianity to the world. Ryle says Whitefield and Wesley were 'spiritual cavalry who scoured the country and were found everywhere.' Stevens, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* uses the same figure when he styles the Methodist itinerants as 'evangelical cavalry.' I have never quite liked this figure. These itiner-

ants were not primarily soldiers, they were heralds. They were not in the saddle to kill or maim men, but to save them. Asbury's purpose in itinerating is indicated elsewhere, but rightly to appraise the strength of this purpose one must know something of where he went and what he had to endure.

Where did Francis Asbury not go? In what place did he not lift up the cross? He literally went everywhere. In his annual or semi-annual episcopal journeys he visited practically every State in the Union every year. His Journal shows that he went into New York State more than fifty times; New Jersey, over sixty; Pennsylvania, seventy-eight; Maryland, eighty; North Carolina, sixty-three; South Carolina, forty-six; Virginia, eighty-four; Tennessee and Georgia, each twenty; Massachusetts, twenty-three times after his first visit there in 1791; and in the other States and Territories with corresponding frequency. Take an atlas and follow him on the map as he makes a typical journey. Leaving New York in the early part of September, he proceeds by Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore; Alexandria, Petersburg, and Norfolk, Virginia; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Charleston, South Carolina, to Washington, in Georgia. Returning through South Carolina, he enters North Carolina; passes on to the western coun-

ties; crosses the mountains to the Holston River, in Tennessee; plunges into the Kentucky wilderness as far as Lexington; returns to the Holston; passes up on the west side of the Alleghenies, over a most mountainous region, through the whole breadth of Virginia, to Uniontown, in Pennsylvania; crosses the Alleghenies by Laurel Hill and Cumberland to Baltimore; goes on to New York; proceeds directly through Connecticut and Massachusetts to Lynn; passes west across the valley of the Connecticut, by Northampton, and over the Berkshire Hills by Pittsfield, to Albany, and then down the valley of the Hudson to New York, where he arrives on the 28th of August, 1792. In later years his episcopal circuit was even more extended.

The feature of Asbury's Journal which undoubtedly most impresses one is the movement disclosed on every page. There is scarcely an entry in which there is not some reference to a journey taken, as for example:

> We have traveled over rough roads and through great heat since we left New York one hundred miles.
>
> Since Friday week we have traveled two hundred miles.
>
> According to my enumeration, I have traveled one hundred and sixty miles in four days.
>
> We have ridden little less than four hundred miles in twenty days and rested one.

My horse trots stiff, and no wonder, when I have ridden him upon an average five thousand miles a year for five years successively!

I shall have ridden in all one thousand miles on the western waters before I leave them. I have been on the waters of the Nollichucky to the mouth of the Clinch, on the north, middle and south branches of the Holston, on New River, Greenbrier, and by the head springs of the Monongahela.

Under the divine protection I came safe to Philadelphia, having ridden about three thousand miles since I left it last.

I rode fifty miles in going and coming to preach that sermon, but hope it was not altogether labor lost.

He seems not to have been without a sense of humor, for he makes this record:

I have journeyed less than one hundred and fifty miles. Perpetual motion is no small trial to my body and mind.

Again,

In four months we compute we have traveled two thousand five hundred and seventy-five miles.

The travels of each day were as follows: Monday, forty-five miles; Tuesday, fifty miles; Wednesday, sixty miles.

The distances which he covered always impressed him; at times he almost stood in awe of his spouse, the Road.

I traveled about three hundred miles to Kentucky in six days, and on my return about five hundred miles in nine days. O what excursions for man and horse!

I make my calculation upon four thousand nine hundred miles from July 30, 1801, to September 12, 1802. If a living man and a Christian might dare to complain!

But he makes few complaints. It is not always, though, that he can refrain from crying aloud:

We have ridden about eighty miles this week of short, cold days. Why should a living man complain? But to be three months together upon the frontiers, where, generally, you have but one room and fireplace, and half a dozen folks about you, strangers perhaps, and their family certainly (and they are not usually small in these plentiful new countries), making a crowd—and this is not all; for here you *may* meditate if you can, and here you *must* preach, read, write, pray, sing, talk, eat, drink, and sleep—or fly into the woods. Well! I have pains in my body, particularly my hip, which are very afflictive when I ride; but I cheer myself as well as I may with songs in the night—with Wesley's, Watts's, and Stennett's.

When he was sixty years of age he writes:

Since the 16th of April, 1805, I have, according to my reckoning, traveled five thousand miles. Everlasting glory be to my All-sufficient God.

There was reason for gratitude. No Empire State Express in those days, no Twentieth Century Limited, but just hard riding on the backs of tired horses. He does confess occasionally, 'I feel the effects of riding a stiff, aged, feeling horse with a sore back, and my saddle is worn and old.'

The difficulties of travel, the hardships which he had to endure, the perils which everywhere beset his path, all must be understood to appreciate the full measure of his devotion to his God-appointed task of gospeling the frontiers. It was a hard, weary Road he had to travel: 'I have in six days ridden about one hundred and fifty miles on as bad roads as any I have seen on the continent.' Winston Churchill, in *The Crossing,* a story of the period in which Asbury traveled the same Wilderness Trail again and again, gives an admirable description of the woods and the dangers of the route to the West. He tells of 'a deep gorge between towering mountains, where a great river cried angrily,' 'the racing Nollichucky, meandering northward through the great Smoky Mountains,' a river Asbury often mentions. Difficult it was, this trail, and full of peril, but beautiful beyond words. 'The path was redolent with odors, and bright with mountain shrubs and flowers—the pink laurel bush, the shining rhododendron, and the grape and plum and wild crab. The clear notes of the mountain birds were in our ears by day, and the music of the water falling over the ledges, mingled with that of the leaves rustling in the wind, lulled us to sleep at night. High above us as we descended the gap, from naked crag to timber-covered ridge, was spanned by the eagle's flight. And virgin

valleys, where future generations were to be born, spread out and narrowed again, valleys with a deep carpet of cane and grass, where the deer and elk and bear fed unmolested.'[1] All this Asbury and many others,

> Some to endure, and many to quail,
> Some to conquer, and many to fail,
> Toiling over the Wilderness Trail,

experienced, but Asbury had little time or inclination to describe what he saw. To him it was just a part of the Road. Yet what he did set down in his Journal is intensely interesting. When he reached Tennessee in 1803 he wrote:

> What a road we have passed! Certainly the worst on the whole continent, even in the best weather. Yet, bad as it was, there were four or five hundred crossing the rude hills while we were. I was powerfully struck with the consideration that there were at least as many thousand emigrants annually from East to West. We must take care to send preachers after these people. We have made one thousand and eighty miles from Philadelphia; and now, what a detail of suffering I might give, fatiguing me to write, and perhaps to my friends to read. A man who is well mounted will scorn to complain of the roads when he sees men, women, and children, almost naked, paddling barefoot and barelegged along, or laboring up the rocky hills, while those who are best off have only a horse for two or three children to ride at once. If these adventurers have little or nothing to eat, it is no extraordinary circumstance,

[1] Winston Churchill, *The Crossing*, p. 84.

and not uncommon, to encamp in the wet woods after night—in the mountains it does not rain, but pours. I too have my sufferings, perhaps peculiar to myself—no room to retire to; that in which you sit common to all, crowded with women and children, the fire occupied by cooking, much and long-loved solitude not to be found, unless you choose to run out into the rain, in the woods. Six months in the year I have had, for thirty-two years, occasionally, to submit to what will never be agreeable to me; but the people, it must be confessed, are among the kindest souls in the world. But kindness will not make a crowded log cabin, twelve feet by ten, agreeable; without are cold and rain, and within six adults, and as many children, one of which is all motion; the dogs, too, must sometimes be admitted. On Saturday I found that among my other trials I had taken an uncomfortable skin disease; and, considering the filthy houses and filthy beds I have met with, in coming from Kentucky Conference, it is perhaps strange that I have not caught it twenty times. I do not see that there is any securing against it, but my sleeping in a brimstone shirt. Poor bishop! But we must bear it for the elects' sake.[1]

What an intensely human document that is! Eleven years before this, when there were fewer people making 'the crossing,' he tells how

Next night we reached Crab Orchard, where thirty or forty people were compelled to crowd into one mean house. We could get no more rest here than we did in the wilderness. We came the old way by Skaggs Creek and Rock Castle, supposing it to be safer, as it was a road less frequented, and therefore

[1] Tipple, *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, pp. 537, 538.

ignorant of the Spirit and Defigns it has ever difcovered in Europe, of rifing to Pre-eminence and worldly Dignities by Virtue of a national Eftablifhment, and by the moft fervile Devotion to the Will of temporal Governors: and we fear, the fame Spirit will lead the fame Church in thefe United States (tho' altered in its Name) to fimilar Defigns and Attempts, if the Number and Strengrh of its Members will ever afford a Probability of Succefs; and particularly, to obtain a national Eftablifhment which we cordially abhor as the great Bane of Truth and Holinefs, the greateft Impediment in the World to the Progrefs of vital Chriftianity.

For thefe Reafons, we have thought it our Duty to form ourfelves into an Independent Church. And as the moft excellent Mode of Church Government according to our matureft Judgment, is that of *a moderate Epifcopacy*; and as we are perfuaded, *that the uninterrupted Succeffion of Bifhops from the Apoftles*, can be proved neither from Scripture nor Antiquity; we therefore have conftituted ourfelves into an *Epifcopal Church*, under the Direction of *Bifhops*, *Elders*, *Deacons*, and *Preachers*, according to the Forms of Ordination annexed to our Prayer Book, and the Regulations laid down in this Form of Difcipline.

SECTION IV.

On the conftituting of Bifhops, and their Duty.

Queft. 1. HOW is a Bifhop conftituted?

Anfw. By the Election of a Majority of the Conference, and the laying on of Hands of a Bifhop, and the Elders prefent.

Queft.

Photographed from the Original in the Library of Drew Theological Seminary.

A PAGE FROM THE RARE DISCIPLINE OF 1787

It is in this Discipline that the word "Bishop" instead of "General Superintendent" is used for the first time. The copy from which the above is taken probably belonged to Jesse Lee, and the marks were doubtless made by him.

less liable to be waylaid by the savages. My body by this time is well tried. I had a violent fever and pain in the head, such as I had not lately felt. I stretched myself on the cold ground, and, borrowing clothes to keep me warm, by the mercy of God I slept four or five hours.

Next morning we set off early, and passed beyond Richland Creek. Here we were in danger, if anywhere. I could have slept, but was afraid. Seeing the drowsiness of the company, I walked the encampment, and watched the sentries the whole night. Early next morning we made our way to Robinson's Station. We had the best company I ever met with, thirty-six good travelers and a few warriors; but we had a packhorse, some old men, and two tired horses, and progress was slow.[1]

Courage was not wanting in this itinerant hero, nor in his comrades of the cross. It is noteworthy how a holy daring, an almost reckless abandon has characterized the itinerants of Christian history. How the fathers drank of that life-giving stream! There was no need to exhort them, 'Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.' They required no urging. They were always in the forefront of every peril, counting not their lives dear unto themselves so that they might finish their course with joy. Fearlessness is an essential element of a conquering faith, and this the Methodist itinerants never lacked. Why should they be afraid? The man who is here to-day, and to-morrow forty miles further

[1] Tipple, *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, p. 335.

on, need have no fear of the wrath of hearers whose consciences have been awakened and whose unholy practices have been denounced. But this is not the explanation. What they possessed was the holy venturesomeness of consecrated men, which always carries with it tremendous powers of conviction and persuasion.

Asbury was constantly in personal danger. Wolves follow him; his horse falls; he crosses the Potomac in an open boat; he is lost in the swamps of South Carolina—'O how terrible to be here in the dark!' in the blackness of the night he is bruised by the trees; his saddle turns and he falls from his horse; he fords the Catawba and finds himself 'among the rocks and in the whirlpools,' escaping with difficulty; through another's carelessness he is 'nearly burnt up'; he falls downstairs; his horse, startled, throws him into a mill-race, and his shoulder is hurt; a whirlwind, accompanied by hailstones 'of such a size that three stones filled a pint measure,' nearly overcomes him; his horse falls on the ice, and Asbury's leg is caught under him; night overtakes him in the mountains, 'among rocks and woods and dangers on all sides'; he has to 'swim a long creek'; ruffians seek his life, a bullet grazing his head as he rides through the forest.

With what picturesqueness, though, he describes the difficulties of some of his journeys!—

Then had we to cross Broad River, and pierce through the woods, *scratch* and go in the bypaths, creep across the newly cleared ground by clambering over trees, boughs, and fence-rails.

I rubbed along, somehow, to Smith's church.

Thus we bolted and blundered along the rocky rivulets.

One of the descents is like the roof of a house for nearly a mile. I rode, I walked, I sweat, I trembled, and my old knees failed.

My flesh is ready to think it something for a man of sixty-six, with a highly inflamed and painful foot, to ride nearly four hundred miles on a stumbling, starting horse, slipping or blundering over desperate roads.

We found the roads disagreeable. While tugging forward, *crack* went the breastboard, and *crack* went the shaft.

Had we not chained the wheel, we should have gone *souse* into Yellow Creek.

Our troubles began at the foaming, roaring stream, which hid the rocks.

We wormed through the scratching woods.

We rode our way through the swamps, floating or sinking as we went.

Much of the time that he is on the Road he is ill and unfit to travel. For this and for other reasons he was glad for company. Among his traveling companions were such men as Edward Bailey, Hope Hull, Nicholas Snethen, his 'silver trumpet,' Asbury called him; Sylvester Hutchinson, Thomas Morrell, Jesse Lee, David Hitt, Henry Boehm, and John Wesley Bond. And

what a comfort some of these men were to him! He needed some one with him, for he journeyed when he 'had a kind of chill and headache'; he 'went' more than six hundred miles 'with an inflammatory fever and fixed pain' in his breast; he traveled for a period of four months during which he was continuously ill, and covered 'not less than three thousand miles'; he 'went' when he had a boil on his face and another on his eye; when his leg was inflamed; when his 'breast was inflamed'; when he had influenza; when he had 'a putrid sore throat'; when he was so ill that he had no appetite for anything except 'a watermelon that Mrs. Tillottson was kind enough to give us as we came by her house'; when he had a toothache; when he had a high fever; when he was so weak that he was ready to faint; when he was in pain from head to foot; when he had a running blister on his side; when he was so ill that his friends expected his speedy death, so ill that to him death would have been welcome; when he had only strength enough to write in his Journal, 'Pain, Pain, Pain'; through rain and snow, through heat, drought, and dust, without food, without drink, over mountains, through deep rivers and muddy creeks, on, on, on, day after day, month after month, year after year, one decade, two, three, four decades, until he reaches the end of the Road and is at rest.

In his journeyings the itinerant bishop had a myriad of interesting experiences. He came in contact with 'all sorts and conditions of men' and women. The Man Without a Home had a thousand homes throughout the land where at the fireside he was ever an honored guest. Early Methodism had not a few most beautiful and far-famed homes, and in these no man found a warmer welcome than Bishop Asbury. At Perry Hall, the home of Henry Dorsey Gough, near Baltimore, considered one of the most elegant country residences in America at the time; in the spacious mansion of Governor Van Cortlandt, that hearty Methodist whose influence helped Methodism throughout New York State; in the Delaware home of Richard Bassett; at General Russell's, whose wife was a sister of Patrick Henry, on the West Virginia Heights; at Governor Tiffin's, in Ohio; at Wildercliffe, the beautiful home of Freeborn Garrettson on the Hudson, which Asbury called 'Traveler's Rest,' and which Boehm says 'the bishop delighted to visit,' and in other like households the tired traveler found himself among dear friends, who rejoiced to minister unto him. But in other less pretentious homes he was the recipient of equally generous kindnesses. 'Came to my old friend, B. Boydstone's. I had the happiness of seeing that tender woman his wife, who careth for the

preachers, as for her own soul; full oft hath she refreshed my spirit.' In many places the utmost kindness was shown him, and was always appreciated. He never fails to make mention in his Journal of courtesies shown him:

We rode about twenty miles to my old friend Joshua Owing's, the forest-home for the Methodists at this time, and found a very agreeable house and family. The old man is 'an Israelite indeed.'

After preaching, Joseph Dallam conducted me to his house, and treated me with great kindness.

And came up to father Gause's, where we met with friendship, fellowship, and love.

We were entertained elegantly, and with great hospitality, at Mr. Boone's.

The most genteel people in Dover treat me with great kindness and courtesy I hope it will turn to their own spiritual advantage.

I was kindly entertained by the people, who refitted our clothing.

Somebody had to do his mending!

At what a variety of places he stopped! 'At a tavern, where I was used well'; 'in a clean log cabin'; 'with a Presbyterian minister'; with a Frenchman, who entertained him gratis; 'in the poor house'; 'under the same roof with actors'; 'at a public house, without fire, candle, or supper, and the host drunk'; at the Widow Boone's, whose family had been entertaining Methodist preachers for six and twenty years; with Samuel Green, 'in pleasing manners and sincere friend-

ship, an evergreen'; with Mr. Hobbs, the jailer; with the Widow Bombry, a mother in Israel, who 'treated us with every mark of attention'; at Mr. Rogers's country seat, 'who told me that when past labor there was his house as my own'; at Brother Bull's, 'who wrought for us gratis what we wanted in shoeing our horses'; at Hanover Davis's, whose 'three sons were killed by the Indians, and his wife and two children taken prisoners and detained from home eighteen months'; at Emory's, 'in the dreary forest —they live well'; at Sutton's, 'the house neat as a palace, and we were entertained like kings by a king and queen.' It was not always thus, however. At times doors were closed to him, and it was almost impossible to find a lodging. 'I hoped for quiet private entertainment at Red Hill, but the gentleman refused to receive us for love, money, or hospitality's sake. I then sent Brother R. to know if we could get in at the next Negro quarter.' Sometimes hospitality was grudgingly shown and on a commercial basis. 'We came to a house five miles from Columbia. We got a little bread, drank our own tea, had our horses fed, and paid two dollars next morning, so the matter ended.'

What contrasts he found! 'Here we had all things richly to supply our wants'; and then, 'neither was the cabin comfortable nor our host

pleasing.' Now he sleeps on a bed 'set upon forks and clapboards laid across on an earthen floor cabin,' 'where the people will have nothing to do with religion'; at the next place on the road he is entertained by one who 'is a gentleman and a Christian.' One Easter Sabbath morning, as he 'rode up to a large house,' he is 'asked to drink brandy,' and was 'glad to retreat.' On another occasion

Night came on, and it was very dark. It rained heavily, and with powerful lightning and thunder. We could not find the path that turned out to Connell's. In this situation we continued until midnight had passed. At last we found a path which we followed until we came to dear old Father Harper's plantation. We made for the house and called. He answered and wondered who it might be. He inquired whence we came. I told him we would tell him when we came in, for it was raining powerfully and we had not much time to talk. When I came dripping into the house he cried, 'God bless your soul! Is it Brother Asbury? Wife, get up!'

Certainly, it was not always that he could lodge with the saints. In some regions there were no Aquilas or Priscillas, and he had to stay with one Caleb Dorsey, 'who was once convinced of sin, but has now grown worse than ever,' and 'who has about forty souls in his family, untaught as the Indians in the forest.' Not always were his hosts cheerful: 'In this tour I lodged at the house of Brother O., mentioned some time ago,

a man of gloomy but solid piety.' Here he stops with 'an old disciple of Mr. Whitefield's,' but who now 'entertains the Methodists'; and then where there is 'a company of gay, worldly people,' a place from which he thought 'it most expedient to depart in peace as soon as it was convenient.' Here an innkeeper invited him to his house, and then he lodged for the night with the mayor of the town. In Chester he stops with Mrs. Withey, who 'keeps the best inn on the continent and always receives the Methodist preachers'; but more frequently the fare is simple, 'a morsel of bread and bacon,' 'potatoes and fried gammon,' and the accommodations crude and uncomfortable. Yet he took what he could get and was thankful. It could not well be otherwise, for he had little money with which to purchase hospitality. The references in his Journal to expenses of his journeys are frequent, sometimes amusing, and always interesting: 'We rode about twenty-two miles and were kindly entertained for five shillings and six pence; I have spent my stock of money three guineas and two half johannas, given me by Mr. Gough and Mrs. Chamier.' 'I crossed Deep River in a flatboat, and the poor ferryman sinner swore because I had not a silver shilling to give him.' 'Wretched lodging and two dollars!' 'At Andrew's tavern, we had to beg and pray to be taken in for the

night; aye, and pay for it too! Our supper and lodging were three dollars!' 'In the last two hundred and seventy miles we suffered much from hunger, heat, and sickness. If we were disposed to stop at taverns (which we are not), our funds would not allow it.' 'We frequently spend a dollar per day to feed ourselves and horses.' 'Our corn here cost us a dollar a bushel.' 'These large ferries are dangerous and expensive: our ferriages alone have cost us three pounds since we left Annapolis.' 'Crossed the Schuylkill at Sewey's. We asked for food and were told the tavern was near. Our money was scarce, we had borrowed five dollars, which will be barely enough to bring us through this inhospitable district. We beat our way along the mountain, stopping at Francis Zellar's, where we were partially welcome.' 'Since I left New York I have spent fifteen dollars, feeding man and beast by the way. I have seen the sufferings of our preachers, and they have awakened all my sympathies.' 'On Tuesday we stopped at Wood's—in the woods. His house being unfinished, there were masons and carpenters, and gentlemen, and riflemen, and whisky topers, besides the gnats and bats, which ever and anon flew in and out. We quitted our purgatory upon paying two and a half dollars for three of us.'

On one occasion one of Asbury's friends

wanted to borrow or beg fifty dollars of him. Asbury said: 'He might as well have asked me for Peru. I showed him all the money I had in the world—about twelve dollars—and gave him five. Strange that neither my friends nor my enemies will believe that I neither have nor seek bags of money. Well, they shall believe by demonstration what I have ever been striving to prove, that I will live and die a poor man.' Herein in part is the secret of Asbury's success. It is often said that riches are power, but so also in the kingdom of God is poverty power. There can be no stronger appeal than that of Christ, who, though rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that by his poverty we might be made rich. Asbury and the other itinerants, like Paul, gave up everything, and counted it but dross, for the joy of heralding the good news. The 'allowance' of the Methodist itinerants—they would not use the word 'salary,' they were not hirelings—scarcely provided them with clothes. William Burke, traveling the Salt River Circuit, famous for its hardships, 'was reduced to the last pinch. My clothes were nearly gone. I had patch upon patch, and I received only money sufficient to buy a waistcoat, and not enough of that to pay for the making.' For one of the two portraits which we have of Asbury we are indebted to the poverty and need of some of the itinerants—a Baltimore

friend who was extremely desirous of having Asbury sit for his likeness offering him a piece of cloth to be made up into clothes for his preachers on that condition. But what if they did not have much money, they were not *poor*. Look at their shining faces. Hear them sing,

His name yields the richest perfume,
  And sweeter than music his voice;
His presence disperses my gloom,
  And bids all within me rejoice;
I should, were he always thus nigh,
  Have nothing to wish or to fear;
No mortal so happy as I,
  My summer would last all the year.

Content with beholding his face,
  My all to his pleasure resigned,
No changes of season or place
  Would make any change in my mind:
While blest with a sense of his love,
  A palace a toy would appear;
And prisons would palaces prove,
  If Jesus would dwell with me there.

Nothing mattered so long as they could tell 'the old, old story.' Over and over again Asbury said that no amount of money could induce him to travel the Long Road; not even 'the wealth of Ormus or of Ind' would compensate for the hardships, the sufferings, the perils of the Road. Is it not fortunate that there are some things which bulk larger in a man's life than money?

This Republic would have been a different country had Francis Asbury not loved Christ more than gold.

It was in the formative period of the United States that he traveled the Long Road, and wherever he went he was the prophet of righteousness. He stopped in a thousand homes on the frontiers, and wherever he lodged he lifted men's thoughts to God and instilled ideas of morality. He builded altars in almost every city and town in the United States, and kindled fires thereon which are still burning. He preached the doctrine of human democracy, when the nation was in the midst of a gigantic struggle with paternalism and aristocracy. He inculcated respect for law and order, and created ideals of brotherhood and citizenship along the mountain trails and through the trackless forests where Civilization walked with slow yet conquering step. He challenged despair with the blessed hope of the gospel, and brought to the lonely the companionship of his Christ. He arrested the attention of murderers and blasphemers, halted the reckless in their mad rush after poison-laden pleasures, started crusades against the iniquitous business of the saloon, which have been gathering momentum with every passing year, comforted myriads in their sorrows and agonies, and like a tender, faithful shepherd sought for lost sheep

from New Hampshire to the Southern Sea, and from the Atlantic to the Blue Grass lands of Kentucky. This Man Without a Home, who traveled the Long Road for a half century, and prayed in ten thousand households, and preached seventeen thousand sermons, and won multitudes to Christ, made a contribution second to no other man in the creation and development of right national ideals of patriotism and religion in the new republic. If any man deserves a place in the Nation's Hall of Fame it is Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road.

CHAPTER IX

THE METHODIST EVANGELISM

On the voyage to America in 1771, very early in the voyage, Asbury subjected himself to a pitiless examination. He dissected his motives, weighed his ambitions, and scrutinized his purposes, and the result was a statement, perhaps the most remarkable in his Journal, and which is regarded as classic as Wesley's description of his Aldersgate experience that evening in May, 1738:

> I will set down a few things that lie on my mind. Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No; I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do.

Here you have the uncovered secret of Asbury's life and labors in America. It is no use to look further for the explanation of his prodigious and unparalleled toils. This love of souls, which became a consuming passion, alone accounts for his grim endurance of hardships and his undying devotion to the Long Road. For him Methodism was evangelism. It was Christianity in dead earnest. Souls were the only priceless things,

Hell's gulfs were yawning; men must be warned of their danger. So, like an arrow through the air, he sped from place to place, crying, 'I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.'

The early years of American Methodism witnessed an almost continuous revival. Scarcely a society was formed which did not grow out of a revival. The denomination grew, not because it was well organized, but because its preachers were well endowed with holy energy and an unction from on high. In 1775, four years after Asbury came, there was the greatest revival of religion in Virginia ever known in that part of the country. The Rev. Devereux Jarratt, a clergyman of the Established Church, was very active in it, and wrote a long account of it to 'my justly admired friend Mr. Asbury'[1] who printed it in full in his Journal, forwarding it also to Mr. Wesley. Jesse Lee says of this revival:

> Mr. George Shadford then preached in Virginia; and while the ears of the people were opened by novelty, God sent his word home upon their hearts. Many sinners were powerfully convinced, and cried for mercy. The news of convictions and conversions were common; and the people of God were inspired with new life and vigor, by the happiness of others.

[1] Drew MSS.

> In almost every assembly might be seen signal instances of divine power, more especially in the meeting of the classes. The shaking among the dry bones increased from week to week. Numbers of old and gray-headed, of middle-aged persons, of youth, yea, of little children, were the subjects of this work.[1]

At one time all Maryland was ablaze with revivals. In New England revival followed revival, some of them of great power. God again visited Virginia in 1787 with a revival which far exceeded that of a decade previous. Jesse Lee, in his account of this revival, says:

> It was common to hear of souls being brought to God while at work in their houses or in their fields. It was often the case, that the people in their cornfields, white people, or black, or sometimes both together, would begin to sing, and being affected would begin to pray; and others would join with them, and they would continue their cries till some of them would find peace to their souls. Some account of this work was published in the newspapers at different times, and by this means spread through all the United States.[2]

Asbury's joy in recording the triumphs of the gospel is seen on every page of his Journal: 'Wilson Lee is all upon the wing in the work. Glory, glory, glory!' 'Surely, we may say our Pentecost is fully come this year when we recollect what God hath wrought.' 'The people sang

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[1] Lee, *History of the Methodists*, p. 54.
[2] Ibid.

and leaped for joy of heart. They have beaten down strong drink, and the power of God is come.' 'The spirit of the Lord came among the people, and sinners cried aloud for mercy. Perhaps not less than twenty souls found the Lord.' 'There was a divine stir in the congregation.' 'To-day I received a letter from Brother Tunnell, informing of the spreading of the work of God in several parts of North Carolina.' 'The fire of the Lord spreads from house to house and from heart to heart.' 'Many professed to be converted to God.' 'The fire spreads throughout the whole neighborhood.' 'The last quarterly meeting was a wonder-working time. Fifty or sixty souls then and there appeared to be brought to God.' 'It was a great day to saints and sinners. Fifty or sixty souls have been strongly and powerfully converted to God.' 'We have good news from a far country. Jersey flames with religion. Some hundreds are converted.' 'The happy news of the revival of the work of God flies from one part of the continent to the other, and all partake of the joy.' Notwithstanding Rankin 'manifested an opposition to the spirit of revivals,' and although Coke was not altogether at home in the emotional excitement of some thrilling scenes which he witnessed, when the slain of the Lord numbered scores, American Methodism grew after this manner.

In 1800 one of the most remarkable spiritual movements of American history began in Kentucky, and spread through Tennessee and Ohio with the amazing swiftness of a prairie fire. On October 20, 1800, Bishop Asbury, while itinerating through Tennessee, attended his first camp meeting. The scenes affected him profoundly. What a picture of a grove meeting is this!

Yesterday, and especially during the night, were witnessed scenes of deep interest. In the interval between preaching the people refreshed themselves and horses, and returned upon the ground. The stand was in the open air, embosomed in a wood of lofty beech trees. The ministers of God, Methodists and Presbyterians, united their labors, and mingled with the childlike simplicity of primitive times. Fires blazing here and there dispelled the darkness, and the shouts of the redeemed captives, and the cries of precious souls struggling into life, broke the silent midnight. The weather was delightful, as if heaven smiled, while mercy flowed in abundant streams of salvation to perishing sinners. We suppose there were at least thirty souls converted at this meeting. I rejoice that God is visiting the sons of the Puritans, who are candid enough to acknowledge their obligations to the Methodists.[1]

The following year was marked by widespread revivals. Ezekiel Cooper, writing to Wesley, some years earlier, had said:

We have it in our power, by the blessing of God, to send you good and great news from our country.

[1] *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, pp. 480, 481.

> Since the General Conference there appears to have been a general revival almost throughout the United States. On what we call the Peninsula, lying between the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, there has been an addition of about three thousand souls to our societies the last year. In some circuits on the Eastern Shore there has been an addition of about one thousand members. In this city we have had the greatest revival I ever knew. Since last November about five hundred have joined us.

A little later he writes: 'The work goes on in a glorious manner in many parts of the United States. In Brother Ware's district there have joined us about one thousand since Conference; and he writes that there is a prospect of greater harvest this year than they had last.' The flame which was started in England had become a conflagration in America, for here Methodism from the beginning was 'a revival Church in its spirit, a missionary Church in its organization.'

In this we have at least two of the determining factors of the rapid spread of Methodism in the closing years of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century. The three marked characteristics which distinguished American Methodism during the first quarter of a century after the organization of the Church were, according to Scudder, its pioneer movements, or church extension, its great demonstrative revivals, and the adaptation of its economy for

permanency and efficiency.[1] The inspiring genius for this mighty forward movement, which received the divine seal as shown by demonstrations of revival power, was Francis Asbury. At the beginning of his American ministry, having, like Peter, seen a vision, and, like Paul, having heard a voice, he wrote:

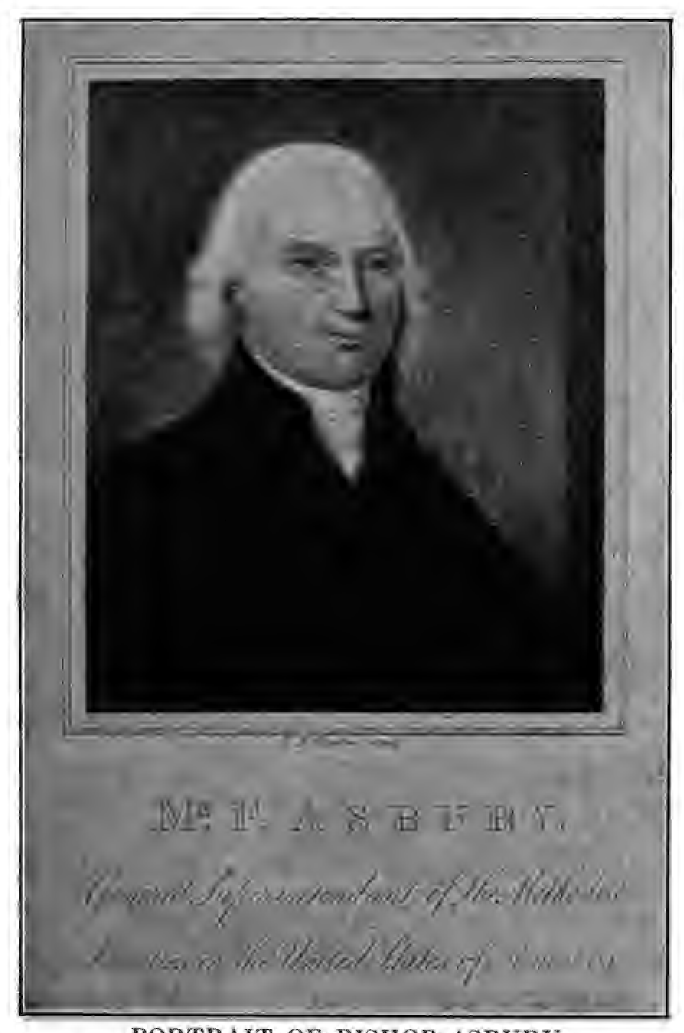
> Many of the people seem to be ripe for the gospel and ready to receive us. I humbly hope before long about seven preachers of us will spread seven or eight hundred miles, and preach in as many places as we are able to attend.

Ah, the 'seven preachers' became a multitude, and the 'seven or eight hundred miles' grew into a continent. At Asbury's command Methodism moved southward through the Carolinas into Georgia, and commenced its march westward, first into the Valley of the Holston beyond the Alleghenies, and then onward into Kentucky and Tennessee, in both of which States, its success was great—in the former so conspicuous that when, in 1792, Kentucky was admitted a State in the Union, there was within its borders a Methodist Conference with twelve preachers and twenty-five hundred members. After a time, in the providence of God, Methodism's march northward began. For twenty years after the formation of the first society in New York

[1] Scudder, *American Methodism*, p. 230.

city the missionary movements of Methodism were almost exclusively toward the south. A few societies had been formed in Westchester and on Long Island, but beyond these, except for the society which Embury organized at Ashton, Methodism was unknown north of New York to the Canadian line. But in 1788 Bishop Asbury appointed Freeborn Garrettson to this large region of country, and he with nine assistants soon formed circuits from New York city to Lake Champlain, and in 1789 one of his preachers went southwest into the Wyoming Valley, which was added to the list of regular appointments. This same year Jesse Lee, who had long entertained a desire to introduce Methodism into New England, began a circuit at Norwalk, Connecticut. At different times during the next two decades, and in many places in New England, were heard other voices pleading the cause of their Lord—James Covel, Aaron Hunt, John Allen, Menzies Rainor, Hope Hull, Ezekiel Cooper, George Roberts, George Pickering, Enoch Mudge, and others—with the result that not only were circuits formed in Connecticut and Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but Methodism advanced also in Maine and Vermont and New Hampshire.

Lorenzo Dow, an eccentric itinerant, preached the first Protestant sermon in the State of Alabama in 1803, and three years later Asbury



PORTRAIT OF BISHOP ASBURY
From the "Methodist Magazine," London, 1809

appointed two missionaries to that wilderness region. It was in 1802 that the cross was uplifted in what is now the State of Indiana. Michigan first heard Methodist preaching in 1803, and Benjamin Young invaded Illinois in 1804. But the missionary spirit of the Church did not spend itself when itinerants were sent to far outlying settlements, to the people on the remote frontiers —as, for example, the Northwest Territory north of the Ohio, which region was entered in 1798, and in ten years was covered with a network of districts and circuits; or the Missouri Territory, a part of Louisiana, into which Methodism was introduced in 1807. The whole spirit of Methodism was diffusive. Its preachers were all missionaries. Every one of them 'was an extensionist,' enlarging his field of operations in every possible direction, opening a new preaching place at this point and that, his circuit in this manner growing steadily, until it had to be divided. Thus in circuit, and district, and State, American Methodism won ever-widening triumphs year after year. When the half hundred preachers met at the Christmas Conference, in 1784, the domain of Methodism in the United States was limited to a narrow belt along the seacoast, with New York city as its northern boundary, and North Carolina as its southern, while it extended inland about one hundred miles. When the

preachers assembled at Baltimore for the General Conference in 1816, four weeks after Asbury's death, Methodism had become well established in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, had covered all the New England States, and had extended southward to the Gulf of Mexico. It had spread out through the inhabited portions of Canada, and formed a northern line along the Great Lakes, striking across the Mississippi, and following that stately river far down toward its mouth.[1] In 1784 it had about eighty preachers and a membership of fifteen thousand. In 1816 the Methodist Episcopal Church was composed of five hundred traveling and two thousand local preachers, and about one hundred and forty thousand members, 'implying congregations who are directly or remotely under the pastoral oversight and ministerial charge, amounting in all probability to more than one million souls." Truly the wilderness *had* blossomed!

Among the contributing causes to the success of the Methodist Evangelism were the men who pressed the battle, men whose zeal was so ardent, whose courage was so audacious, whose devotion was so complete, whose ability to endure hardships and suffering so remarkable, that, like Hercules, whether they rode or prayed or preached, whatever they did, they conquered.

[1] Scudder, *American Methodism*, p. 249.

There are no more splendid careers in life or literature than those of the early years of American Methodism. While, like Saul, Asbury stands head and shoulders above his brethren, in unconquerable zeal, in passionate energy, in the flaming of a 'divine fire which kept his life incandescent until he dropped at last in the pulpit, consumed by it, or rather borne by it away as if ascending like the Hebrew prophet in a chariot of fire,' he had many worthy comrades. Once when crossing through the Cumberland Gap, the gateway to Kentucky, a wild trail till the first settlements at Crab Orchard were reached, and a route of constant peril even beyond that wilderness settlement, Asbury stood guard over the camp throughout the night. Bangs, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* commenting on this entry, says, 'Let the present race of Methodist preachers and missionaries look at this picture, and learn from it how the fields were won by such veterans of the cross.' The native preachers of America, men who were born and began their itinerant life in America, cannot be classified. They were not made after a common pattern. 'Herein lies one glory of the early Methodist pioneers—they were individual almost to uniqueness.' The explanation of this is that they were the first fruits of a new country. These native preachers were men peculiarly

adapted for pioneer work, of defiant energy, unyielding tenacity of purpose, and matchless courage, who laughed at hardships, welcomed perils, and triumphed over the indescribable difficulties of an unsettled and undeveloped country. Their deeds of heroism will not suffer in comparison with those sturdy heroes immortalized in that temple of fame, the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. What a noble band of heroic souls they were! In thinking of them one scarcely knows where to begin.

But there was Philip Gatch, sometimes spoken of as 'the second native preacher,' yet yielding place to no one in his devotion to his Lord. His biographer says that 'since the days of the apostles, there had scarcely been a time when so much prudence, firmness, enduring labors, and holiness were required as in the propagation of Methodism in America.' And he was in need of all the courage he could muster, for almost all of those early preachers were called upon to endure persecutions. In Maryland a ruffian attempted to strike Gatch with the chair at which the preacher was kneeling, but was thwarted in his purpose. On one occasion Gatch was seized by two men who tortured him as Savonarola was tortured, by turning his arms backward until they described a circle, almost dislocating his shoulders. A conspiracy was formed to murder

him, but the plot was revealed, and he kept on rebuking the sins of the people.

In 1788 alone forty-eight preachers were admitted on trial, among them Valentine Cook and William McKendree. The latter, who was born in Virginia in 1757, served in the Revolutionary army, and was present at the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, became the chief leader of Methodism in the West. Of tremendous energy and administrative genius, deeply pious, a preacher of transcendent power, a man of the saintliest character, he became a bishop in 1808, but was never greater than when he was leading the itinerant hosts in 'the regions beyond.' Valentine Cook was 'one of the wonders of the primitive Methodist ministry.' Born among the mountains of Virginia, he became a famous hunter and never knew fear. It is said that no man of his day in the West wielded greater power in the pulpit.

There was Enoch George, like McKendree, large in stature, strong and full of energy, who, when Asbury at the North Carolina Conference in 1793 called for a volunteer to 'go to the desert land, the almost impassable swamps, to the bilious diseases of the Great Pee Dee, the region of poverty and broken constitutions,' sprang to his feet saying, 'Here am I, send me.' He was willing to take any risk, eager to undertake any enterprise,

however difficult, for the sake of the Saviour of mankind. So also was Woolman Hickson, a man of brilliant genius and fine enthusiasm, who, though dying of consumption, like David Brainerd, whose life Wesley reprinted, when sent by Jonathan Edwards from Northampton in 1743 to the frontiers of the Empire State, offered himself for missionary work in Nova Scotia.

There was Jesse Lee, a spiritual son of the first American itinerant, Robert Williams, 'human to the red-ripe heart of him, fearing no man, daunted by no obstacles, equal to any crisis,' the first historian of American Methodism, chaplain in the United States Senate, like Asbury, never marrying, that he might give himself entirely to the Methodist Evangelism; and Ezekiel Cooper, a companion and fellow worker with Lee in New England, to whom Wesley addressed the last letter he wrote to anyone in America, and who at the request of the Philadelphia Conference preached the funeral sermon on the death of Asbury; and George Dougherty, that South Carolinian, who introduced a resolution at his Conference to the effect that 'if any preacher should desert his station through fear, in time of sickness or danger, the Conference should never employ that man again'; and John Cooper, a humble but memorable evangelist, whose father, detecting him praying after joining the Meth-

odists, threw a shovel of hot coals upon him and expelled him from the house; and Henry Willis, who, although sinking under pulmonary consumption like many another itinerant, energized by his irrepressible ardor the work of the Church throughout two thirds of its territory; and William Burke, a name to conjure with, who traveled the Salt River Circuit, famous for its hardships, nearly five hundred miles in extent, which had to be covered every four weeks, with continual preaching, amid extremest poverty, and painfully inadequate support; and Robert R. Roberts, the first leader of the first class in the Erie Conference, destined to become one of the most effective evangelists and bishops of the Church which had found him in those remote woods; a stalwart youth, a child of the wilderness, 'wearing,' says his biographer, 'the common backwoods costume—the broad-rimmed, low-crowned, white-wool hat, the hunting-shirt of tow linen, buckskin breeches, and moccasin shoes. When he first presented himself in the Baltimore Conference he had traveled thither, from the Western wilds, with bread and provender in his saddlebags and with one dollar in his pocket'; and there was Russel Bigelow, a man of concentrated intensity, 'which, like electric fire, consumed into thin vapor all material hindrances that impeded the passage of his soul into the

minds and hearts of his listeners.' Dr. Little says that he can hardly write of Bigelow without the desire to throw himself at his feet. This man went about clothed like a beggar, but then, those itinerant evangelists, bent only upon saving souls, gave little attention to dress—'McKendree preached the sermon that made him bishop in coarse garments of Western homespun. Roberts came to Baltimore in clothes upon whose mendings his loving wife had well-nigh sewed away her eyes.'

Time would fail to tell of the evangelistic successes of William Watters, Thomas Ware, Freeborn Garrettson, John Tunnell, John Major, Nelson Reed, George Mair, and a host of others, equally individualistic and equally renowned in Methodist history; but I would fain speak of one other, as illustrative of what was accomplished by the rough, untaught evangelists of those germinal years of the denomination. 'I met with and heard Benjamin Abbott,' wrote Asbury, February 14, 1781. 'His words came with great power. The people fall to the ground under him and sink into a passive state, helpless, stiff, and motionless. He is a man of uncommon zeal, and although his language has somewhat of incorrectness, of good utterance.' This is Asbury's brief account of this unusual man, whom Stevens considers 'in many respects the most

remarkable evangelist in an eventful field at that period.' He was a man of unusual constitution, few men being able to contend with him in bodily strength. A rough, wicked, almost brutal man, till forty years of age, when, October 12, 1772, a day which he annually observed thereafter in fasting, prayer, and thanksgiving until his death, he was converted. Almost immediately after his conversion he began to preach Christ and him crucified. A man of great humility, of great faith, without fear of man or devil, his sermons which were plain, simple, and illiterate, were frequently attended with such manifestations of divine power that many fell before him like men slain in battle. In his memoir of him Asbury says:

Perhaps he was one of the wonders of America, no man's copy, an uncommon zealot for the blessed work of sanctification, and preached it on all occasions and in all congregations, and, what was best of all, lived it. He was an innocent, holy man. He was seldom heard to speak about anything but God and religion. His whole soul was often overwhelmed with the power of God. He was known to hundreds as a truly primitive Methodist preacher and a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost. His last labors were upon the Eastern shore, where many will remember him for years to come and will, we hope and trust, shout the praises of God and the Lamb with him to all eternity. Several revivals have taken place by his means, sometimes upon the hearts of the preachers and the people. Yea, we

trust the sacred flame still spreads in the much-favored peninsula begun chiefly by his instrumentality. His life was pressed out at every pore of the body. He was brought very low before he died and made perfect through suffering.

Is it any wonder that the gospel as preached by such brave souls proved to be in every place the power of God unto salvation? 'The heroic mission of Methodism's early ministry is significant illustration of its preaching. Chivalry, romance unsurpassed in modern history, at least since the days of the crusades, color all their experiences. Absorbed as they were in the value of the individual soul, their imaginations were not kindled by any dreams of ecclesiastical empire. Pictures of modern Methodist edifices or of modern Methodist audiences could have yielded them no inspiration. They believed, and therefore they spoke. They had souls to take care of, and they cared for them by the best methods which their intellects could devise. Leaving to God the business of opening doors, and accepting for themselves the humbler business of entering such doors as he might open, enabled the Methodist pioneers, as it enables all the elect of God, to do a work of whose importance and magnitude the furthest sighted of them all had only faint and uncertain glimpses.' [1]

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[1] Little, *Proceedings Centennial Methodist Conference*, p. 214.

The effectiveness of the Methodist Evangelism was the result in part of the preaching of the Methodist doctrines. This was one of the distinctively vital forces of Methodism operating for the achievement of her success. The earlier preaching of the itinerants was markedly doctrinal. Methodism was not a new theology, but a restatement of the great fundamental truths of the gospel. No other kind of preaching could have produced such marvelous results. I make no claim that these primary truths were preached in a scholastic or scientific manner. Asbury was not a theologian. Neither did his preachers affect to be. They were all too intensely earnest in this business of soul-saving to teach theology or to preach it in academic fashion. Such a method has always had to give way in all the great revivals of the Christian centuries to another and better method of doctrinal preaching, a method of plain, practical statement and earnest enforcement in direct and pungent appeal to the religious consciousness. The preacher has been the voice of God to warn, to exhort, to persuade. In Nineveh there is heard a cry, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' and the greatest revival in the shortest time in history is the result. John the Baptist goes up and down Palestine calling, 'Repent!' Jesus, sending his disciples along the highways, bids

them, 'As ye go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Peter the Hermit summoned men to a crusade with the oft-repeated 'God wills it.' The early Methodist itinerants had little to do with the questions of the day. The newness of the nation, the widely scattered peoples, the long journeys, the absence of church organizations, led the preachers to confine themselves to comparatively few subjects, but these were vital. They took their stand on fundamental and essential truths. They had no time to discuss questions of doctrine or to debate mooted questions of theology. 'They entered a village, sounded the alarm, held up the cross, and were gone.' What every preacher tried to do in every sermon was to answer the one great question, What must I do to be saved? Thus he preached God in his infinite holiness and justice and love, and a doctrine of sin most effective in producing the profoundest sense of guilt and peril. The final judgment in the array of its solemnities and issues was heralded in all its awesome imminence and reality. So also was Christ, the Saviour, joyously preached—preached in the fullness of his grace and the pathos of his love. The salvation offered in his name was free and full, and realizable in a present assurance and joyous experience.

Further, this fact that the experience into

which the early Methodists entered under the preaching of these fundamental Christian truths was a joyous experience of grace in Jesus Christ was a large factor in the success of Methodist Evangelism. People really enjoyed religion. They were happy in Jesus. How could they be otherwise than happy, those early Methodists, for they had entered into the privileges of a personal salvation, simply through faith in Christ, and of the direct witness of the Spirit to a gracious adoption and sonship. They were children of God, heirs with Christ to a blessed inheritance. Their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. They were children of the King. The marvel of Aldersgate Street was that a seeking soul came directly into personal fellowship and communion with its divine Lord and Master with the blessed result of a consciousness of personal forgiveness and sonship. And it was this sense of sonship, a sense as regnant as in the New Testament, which made the Methodist Evangelism irresistible. How could it be otherwise? Asbury and his associates in the ministry had a royal message to announce to men, a message of life and liberty from God to perishing men. They themselves had experienced the joys of salvation. Not less was their conviction that they were its divinely chosen messengers to the people. A ministry with such convictions must

be effective. Whoever is believed to have a word from God will find a hearing. Once the fact was established that the Methodist itinerants were bearers of a divine announcement, this in itself was a powerful factor in the extension of the Kingdom. But when was added to this the other fact, that those who heard the announcement and by grace received the gift of God, entered into a joyous Christian experience, and published abroad the joys of the Christian life, and were jealous that others should taste and see, the Church grew by leaps and bounds.

The obstacles which were sure to present themselves to the converts, the opposition which had to be borne down by them, the patient endurance of reproach and contumely and even painful persecution, all made the triumphs of the heralds of redemption in Christ more difficult and yet more glorious. Bishop Asbury tells of a surgeon in the English army who was present on the Plains of Abraham, where General Wolfe met death with a shout upon his lips and Captain Webb lost an eye, and who later settled in Virginia, and then moved from there to the Kentucky wilderness. His wife heard an itinerant Methodist preacher and was converted, whereupon her energetic soldier-physician husband promptly put a mustard plaster on the back of her head 'to draw the Methodism out of her.' But he did not realize at that

time, though he learned the beautiful secret later, what John Wesley said he early discovered, that religion is not so much of the head as of the heart! It was this profound conviction that salvation is a matter of personal allegiance to Jesus Christ, and that once experienced, nor height, nor depth, nor principalities, nor powers, nor opposition, nor malice, nor persecution, nor anything except sin, can separate one from the love of God in Christ Jesus, which the Methodist converts believed, and their confidence and their patience under suffering helped to widen the circle of believers.

The gospel preached by the Methodist itinerant, moreover, robbed even death of its terrors. More than that the prospect was positively alluring. The 'sweet fields beyond the swelling flood' beckoned them. Heaven was much in their thought; songs of the Homeland almost constantly on their tongues. It was the plaintive voice of Caleb Pedicord, singing as he walked through the forest,

> I cannot, I cannot forbear
> These passionate longings for home;
> O, when shall my spirit be there,
> O, when will the Messenger come?

which arrested the attention of Thomas Ware, a young soldier of the colonies, who afterward became a mighty itinerant, and won him to Christ. One of the songs which my grand-

mother, the widow of a Methodist itinerant who burned himself out and died from exposure at thirty-five, often crooned as she rocked me to sleep, and which is as a sweet odor to me to this day, was

> O come, angel band, come and around me stand,
> O bear me away on your snowy wings,
> To my eternal home.

'Our people die well' was something more than a sententious phrase uttered by John Wesley. It was true to fact. Lecky calls attention to this important feature of Methodism, its service in the house of sorrow and death. It can never be overlooked by any historian of the movement or student of Methodist Evangelism. The itinerant preacher, like John Bunyan, never let go the Christian Pilgrim from the moment he left the City of Destruction until he had landed him in the Celestial City. And is it not worth while remembering that that immortal book of Bunyan is the *Pilgrim's* Progress, that Bunyan, like John Keble, felt that the salvation of one soul was worth more than the Magna Chartas of a thousand worlds, and to succeed in leading one Pilgrim through the Slough of Despond, past the Lions, and over the sunny Delectable Mountains into the City of God, was a service of incalculable value. Methodism in its spirit and its enterprise was individualistic. It was after the *last*

man. Its influence upon the individual was more in the line of its belief and mission than upon society as a mass. Its theology was personal. Jesus Christ was a personal Saviour. The call to discipleship was individual: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' The Master's work was chiefly with individuals, a Nicodemus, a Mary Magdalene, a Bartimæus, a Thomas. The last judgment, when every one must give an account, would be personal and individual: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least, ye did it unto me.' The hymns of the Methodist movement were intensely individual. Personal pronouns abounded. Read the early hymns of Charles Wesley, how intimately personal they are: 'Lord, I despair myself to heal'; 'And can it be, that I should gain'; 'I thirst, Thou wounded Lamb of God'; 'O what shall I do, my Saviour to praise?' 'My God, I am thine.' Folks were again walking with Jesus Christ along Palestinian highways, or talking with him at Jacob's Well or in some Bethany home, or sitting with him at the table. Christ was a real person once more, a personal friend and Saviour, and the scenes of the first century were being witnessed again in the eighteenth century.

Methodism's garnering began with an individual. It was before the days of the Holy Club even, while John Wesley was preparing for

orders, that he and a friend went to Saint Mary's Church, Oxford, to attend the funeral of a person with whom both of them had been acquainted. During the evening as they talked together Wesley asked his companion if he really thought himself his friend, and if so whether he would not do him all the good that lay in his power. Receiving an affirmative reply, Wesley begged him to become a Christian. The friend became exceedingly serious, and the good impression was abiding.[1] In this method of personal approach John Wesley was simply following in his Lord's steps. Jesus Christ was a pastoral evangelist. That was his business. For that purpose he was sent into the world. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He was both Shepherd and Saviour. In this fact we have alike the explanation and interpretation of his life. His divine purpose was shown at the very beginning of his public ministry. His first approach to men was with a call to personal allegiance for a work of evangelism. From the beginning Christianity has aimed at reformation, and in Christianity alone is to be found the true philosophy of individual and community betterment. But Christ had no measures for the reformation of society as a mass. It was the individual which must be reached and changed. This conception

[1] Telford, *The Life of John Wesley*, pp. 39, 40.

of individual worth is the root of all evangelism. Men and women do not come to destruction in herds like cattle, but one by one. They must be saved in the same way. Jeremy Taylor, whose *Holy Living and Holy Dying* was of such help to John Wesley, said, 'When God would save a man he does it by way of a man.' It is not improbable that Wesley read that very sentence. His whole ministry was his witness to a like conviction. Our fathers by their preaching and their labors bore a similar testimony. Is there any possibility that in these modern days this eternal fact of the supreme value of the individual soul, and the other eternal fact of the divine method of evangelizing the world may be forgotten or ignored? Or is there danger that the greatest contributing factor to the unparalleled victories of the Methodist Evangelism, namely, the power of the Holy Spirit, may be overlooked? God promised the Spirit as an effective agency in the preaching of the gospel. 'Lo, I am with you alway.' This promise had its fulfillment in the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. This presence of the Spirit is ever the living power of the ministry. It has been since the days of Christ upon the earth. The Holy Spirit was the dependence of Asbury and his associates, coming down upon them in answer to their prayers. Thus they preached, and multitudes were swayed

as forest trees by the storm. Many, conscience-stricken and prostrate beneath the truth and the Spirit of power in the truth, looked unto the Lamb of God and were saved. Here is the unfolding of the mystery of the Methodist Evangelism: 'Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.' And in no other way can the Kingdom of God come in the twentieth century or in any age.

O that we might the Spirit find
  By Jesu's grace bestow'd,
Which leads us into all the mind,
  And all the things of God!
Come, Holy Ghost, thy power display,
  And teach us all in one,
Teach us in Christ the living Way
  To God's eternal throne.

CHAPTER X

ASBURY AS A PREACHER

'I PREACHED' is the entry which most frequently appears in Asbury's Journal. And why not? That was his business. He was a Methodist preacher, with equal emphasis on both words. Ecclesiastically, for twenty-five years after he began to preach, he was nothing else but a preacher. Not until he was forty years old did he administer the ordinances of the Church, for not until he had been ordained at the Christmas Conference in 1784 did he feel that he had the right to baptize or to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But he had no least doubt of his right to preach. When on one occasion a 'church minister' inquired who he was and whether he was licensed, 'speaking great, swelling words' and forbidding him to preach, 'I let him know,' Asbury said, 'that I came to preach, and preach I would. I told him I had authority from God. I began to preach, and urged the people to repent, and turn from all their transgressions, so iniquity should not prove their ruin.' The inscription on the monument in Baltimore erected to bear witness to his remark-

able life makes record that he 'with much zeal continued to "preach the Word" for more than half a century.' Preaching was his master-passion. He left his native land, he denied himself the joys of home life, never marrying, just that he might preach. He was only about fifteen when he began 'to venture a word of exhortation'; three years later he became a local preacher. In 1766 for nine months 'he went through Staffordshire and Gloucester in the place of a traveling preacher,' and the following year he was 'admitted on trial' for the itinerant ministry as a preacher. En route to America he preached many times on shipboard. Storms did not deter him, for when it was very windy he fixed his back against the mizzen mast and 'preached freely on those well-known words, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."' He preached on landing in Philadelphia, and thereafter for forty-five years scarcely a day passed that he did not preach, sometimes three times a day, occasionally five times, often under trying conditions, frequently in the midst of perils, but always with definiteness of aim and unfailing devotion to the supreme purpose of his ministry.

Asbury was from conviction an itinerant preacher. Some men have enjoyed the distinc-

tion of long pastorates. Storrs was forty-four years in Brooklyn, Cuyler thirty in the same city, Albert Barnes thirty-seven in Philadelphia. Comparatively little of Asbury's life was spent in the cities. His voice was heard in many places. When he reached New York he found Boardman and Pilmoor playing battledoor and shuttlecock between that city and Philadelphia, and wrote in his Journal, 'My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way.' Ah, he did show them the way indeed! Again he writes: 'I remain in New York though unsatisfied with our being in town together. I have not yet the thing which I seek, a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan.' With what fidelity he followed the 'Methodist plan' the world knows. His annual journeys took him more than six thousand miles a year, and wherever he went he never failed to remember the command, 'As ye go preach.' It is estimated, as I say elsewhere, that he must have preached nearly seventeen thousand sermons, and these were delivered not in great churches, as a rule, but wherever he could obtain a hearing.

The comfortable places to preach were the exception, so much so that he notes them in his Journal, as, for example: 'a good meetinghouse, with a glass window behind the pulpit, so that we

can see to read without raising a shutter and receiving all the wind that comes.' More frequently he preached in houses and barns, 'Billup's barn,' 'Walker's barn,' 'Woolsey's barn,' 'Jarratt's barn,' 'at old father Stedman's,' 'in Philip Cummin's kitchen,' 'in the widow Bynton's back-room,' and a thousand other houses. Then there were chapels where he held forth regularly on his rounds—Barratt's, Gough's, Garrettson's, Lane's, Mabry's, Saint George's in Philadelphia, John Street in New York, Light Street in Baltimore. In what a variety of places he sounded the trumpet of the Lord!—'in a tavern,' in a 'wreck of an old Presbyterian meetinghouse, at Wapping Creek,' in 'a storehouse now turned into a preaching house,' 'under an arbor near the church,' 'Culpepper courthouse' (it was here that he 'heard the good news that Britain had acknowledged the independence for which America had been contending'); at 'Stephen Harland's under the spreading trees,' in an 'old meetinghouse belonging to the general Baptists,' 'Swanbury in sight of the sea,' 'in a tobacco-house,' 'in a close log house, without so much as a window to give us air,' in a 'Methodist-Presbyterian church,' 'in a paper mill,' 'in an orchard,' in the 'poorhouse,' 'in the playhouse,' in 'Kent's Old Chapel,' in the 'Log church,' 'in the Dutch church,' 'in Coxe's Fort,' in the 'Episcopal

Church,' in the 'meetinghouse of the Separatists,' 'in a small grove, where we had a green carpet of nature's spreading underneath, and an umbrella of variegated leaves over us,' 'the market place in Albany,' 'at the new African church,' 'upon the banks of the Banister River,' in 'a log pen open at the top, bottom, and sides,' 'Love's church, which has glass windows and a yard fenced in,' 'underneath the courthouse within the arches,' 'at an Ephrata in the woods,' 'in a solitary place amongst the pines,' on 'Staten Island at the old *Blazing Star,*' by 'the Old Well at Absolom Day's,' 'at Cawles's ironworks,' 'Doctor Lawrence's store,' 'in the barroom, and had life and liberty,' 'in a log cabin, scarcely fit for a stable,' 'in the elegant courthouse in New Lancaster,' 'Newton's Academy,' 'Henkel's Tavern,' 'Gody's schoolroom,' from his carriage, from the end of his little Jersey wagon 'screened by a drawn curtain behind him,' 'in the open air, facing the sun,' 'from a stand in the woods,' with a blanket to screen him from the sun, and his cap on to shelter him from the wind. On one occasion he stood in one of the windows and preached, as he says, very loud to a large congregation outside; on another, in the door of the public house, with about half of his congregation outside.

He was on the watch every moment for a

chance to preach. Preaching was his life. It mattered little whether there were many or few to hear him, he would deliver his soul, and pass on. God was his judge. He was not seeking for popularity. So we find him preaching 'behind the barracks, to a number of soldiers and others,' at the Ferry, 'at the gallows to a vast multitude,' again at the execution of a criminal, and yet again 'from a wagon at the execution of the prisoners'; 'at Widow Bond's to black and white, rich and poor.' Once at Tarborough he found a fire had been made in a small apartment of the courthouse and supposed the room had been made ready for preaching, but discovered that it was for a dance instead. The dancing was soon stopped, and soon Asbury 'had a serious congregation to hear.' His congregations were usually serious before he had been long preaching. This was characteristic of his life and his preaching—the solemnity of living. A young man once asked Grotius for advice and was given this precept: 'Be serious.' Asbury was always serious. He had a sense of the humorous, and sometimes indulged in a play on words and other forms of pleasantry Boehm gives several instances, and a certain playfulness of spirit is occasionally seen in his Journal, but the gravity of life and the judgment possessed him and colored all his sermons.

Asbury never preached topical sermons. There was no touch of sensationalism in his discourses, except the sensationalism of terrible reality. His views of life and the sacredness of his vocation will explain his style and method in preaching, and especially his ceaseless activities. One is impressed with his fidelity to his opportunities.

> I spent part of the week in visiting from house to house. I feel happy in speaking to all I find, whether parents, children, or servants; I see no other way; the common means will not do; Baxter, Wesley, and our Form of Discipline, say 'Go into every house.' I would go farther, and say, go into every kitchen and shop; address all, aged and young, on the salvation of their souls.

He could not afford to miss an opportunity. The blood of the slain would be upon him. Therefore when he takes shelter in a house from the rain, he talks and prays with a poor woman; therefore he rides to Germantown to see aged Mother Stell, and sister Lusby, although he could hardly walk or talk, for he must needs speak to the women of the house about their souls; therefore when musing in his own mind how he could spend the morning of a certain day, he concluded to call the family into the room and address them pointedly, one by one, concerning their souls; therefore one day, having a desire to be doing good somewhere, he was led to speak to a woman unknown

to him, whom he urged to pray three times a day, and received her promise with tears; therefore in whatever house he entered, private or tavern, he prayed and talked, that being, as he declared, a part of his mission. He was after souls wherever he could find them. The zeal of the Lord consumed him.

So when he spoke or preached it was with burning intensity. Terrible earnestness was characteristic of his preaching. His manner in preaching was awesome and terrifying. His Journal is prolific in such impressive characterizations as: 'I delivered a close and awful discourse'; 'I was very alarming, seldom, if ever, have I felt more moved'; 'sinners, Pharisees, backsliders, hypocrites, and believers were faithfully warned'; 'I preached long, and perhaps a terrible sermon'; 'I was enabled to give a close, alarming exhortation on the alarming and awful times'; 'it was an awful talk, and the people were alarmed; let them look to it'; 'it is our duty, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, to declare, that if they die in their sins they can expect nothing but hell and damnation.' Joshua Marsden says as a preacher, though not as an orator, he was dignified, eloquent, and impressive. His sermons were the result of good sense and sound wisdom, delivered with great authority and gravity and often at-

tended with divine unction, which made them as refreshing as the dew of heaven. Many of his texts were of a nature to strike terror in the hearts of his hearers, and they were meant to do this very thing. Asbury was not like a general watching a dress parade, but as one in the forefront of the fray. He was engaged in stern business. Self-complacency, indifference, unrighteousness were implacable foes, and he used heavy guns and large ammunition, such as:

And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil (Zeph. 1. 12).

And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (Matt. 21. 44).

Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head (Ezek. 33. 4).

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9. 27).

For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall (Mal. 4. 1–2).

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God (Psa. 9. 17).

These, and others of like portent, formed the ground of appeal to the fears of men. Knowing the terror of the Lord, he persuaded thereby. What a distance we have come from that kind of preaching! Sinai no longer belches forth flame and fury. His sons in the gospel have grown to be milder-mannered men!

The time element played an important part in Asbury's preaching. With him it was always *now,* with a tremendous emphasis. He was an itinerant, he might never pass that way again, therefore he seized the moment to urge an immediate decision. He declares his purpose 'to preach present conviction, present conversion, and present sanctification.' Once at the end of a tiresome journey, he writes, 'After a little rest, I cried, "Now is the day of salvation," ' a text which he frequently used, as also this other: 'And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light!' (Rom. 13. 11-12). This sense of the importance of immediate decisions gave an urgency to his appeals which was well-nigh irresistible. He would not be refused, for the

time was at hand when judgment might begin. With relentless insistence he demanded that his hearers 'choose this day whom ye will serve.'

The fact that he was an itinerant preacher had this other effect also: it made him both simple and direct, and also lengthy. The way must be made plain, the truth must be comprehensively set forth. There must be no possibility of a plea of ignorance. He dealt therefore with fundamentals. When he went to Georgetown in 1785, 'I told my hearers,' he writes, 'that I expected to stay in the city but seven days; and that I should preach every night, if they would favor me with their company, and that I should speak on subjects of primary importance to their souls, and explain the essential doctrines taught and held by the Methodists.' His desire to set before his hearers the gospel in its fullness often led him to preach at length. He seldom took less than an hour. He mentions numerous sermons two hours long.

> I was led out and we were employed until nearly twelve o'clock at night.
>
> Upon the whole, I believe we were speaking about four hours, besides nearly two spent in prayer.
>
> About six we began exhortation and prayer, and about midnight laid ourselves down to rest.

Whatever time was needed was taken, people paying in those days small heed to the slow-run-

ning sands of the hourglass. Preachers then had more than thirty minutes in which to wake the dead, if they needed it. Mark Twain's shrewd remark that if a man doesn't strike fire within twenty minutes he is not likely to do so at all, is probably true of many preachers, but not of all. Durbin was slow in getting under way, so was Asbury. But whether slow or swift, there must have been comfort in the feeling that whatever time was required was at his disposal. Sermons in those days were not judged by the clock or measured with the yardstick, but by effects and results.

Asbury was a good sermonizer. He knew how sermons ought to be made and how they should be preached. His comments on sermons and preachers were keen. Hearing Rankin, he found him 'wanting' as a preacher. After listening to an exhortation of Isaac Rawling, which he thought 'coarse and loud enough, though with some depth,' he gave him proper advice, which, fortunately no doubt, 'he seemed willing to take.' Again: '—— as usual, made a mighty clatter in the pulpit about Noah's ark.' 'Afterward went to church and heard J Cromwell, an original indeed—no man's copy.' On another occasion he wrote concerning this same Cromwell: 'He is the only man I have heard in America with whose speaking I am never tired; I always

admire his unaffected simplicity.' Of another he remarked: 'He uses a few pompous, swelling words, which pass for something great among shortsighted people, but are not calculated to do much spiritual good.' Of still another preacher: 'I heard Dr. —— blow away on "This is the day that the Lord hath made." He makes a strange medley of his preaching; though he tells many good things, yet, for want of some arrangement of his ideas, all appears to be incoherency and confusion.' He is no whit less severe with himself, however. 'I roared out wonderfully'; 'my mind was shut up, and I had no power to speak to the people'; 'bore a feeble testimony for nearly an hour'; 'I raged and threatened the people, and was afraid it was spleen'; 'I preached and stormed a great deal,' are some of his comments on his own public work. He doubtless did have his 'hard times' like all preachers, ancient and modern. There were times when he would not even attempt to preach: 'I chose not to preach while my mind was clogged by business with so many persons and on so many subjects.' The marvel is, when one remembers his long and continuous journeyings, the thousand burdens which he carried wherever he went, the exacting demands upon all his energies during all his waking hours, the inability to find quiet places for meditation where he was entertained, that he could

preach with any effectiveness whatsoever. Yet he did. The denominational progress which was made in the first half century was due largely to preaching, and, indeed, to his preaching.

Early Methodist preaching had several characteristics which account for its immeasurable power. The preachers believed themselves called of God, and as a result were in deadly earnest whenever they discoursed. Believing further that they were to be, as Wesley urged, 'men of one book,' they lived in the Book as did John Bunyan, accepting it as a divine revelation, and their sermons, therefore, were biblical through and through. The prayer element also vitally entered into Methodist sermon-making, Methodist sermons, and Methodist preaching. It was said of the seraphic Summerfield that 'he not only prayed before he preached and after he preached —for he went to the pulpit from his knees, and to his knees from the pulpit—but he seemed to be praying while he preached, invoking blessings for, while he pleaded with, sinners and saints.' Asbury, like Summerfield, prayed much. When he did not pray enough the outcome was disastrous: 'Talking too much, and praying too little, cause me to feel barrenness of soul.' But it was not for lack of prayer that his sermons did not go well. No one of his colleagues prayed more than he did.

One who was intimately acquainted with Asbury and heard him preach frequently, said, 'Asbury was the only preacher who preached *to* his text. He never preached from it, as many do who select a passage as the mere theme of a discourse, the discussion of which would be as applicable to an axiom of Coleridge as to the text, but he would start a proposition, and in its elaboration, would come directly *to* the text. With him proposition, argument, illustration, incident, everything was either immediately drawn from or directly connected with the subject of discourse.' That is high praise. To go straight to the heart of a text, is not that the highest art of preaching?

The Bible furnished Asbury not only his texts but also the substance of his discourses. 'Arose, as I commonly do, before five o'clock in the morning,' he once said early in his ministry, 'to study the Bible. I find none like it; and find it of more consequence to a preacher to know his Bible well than all the languages or books in the world, for he is not to preach these, but the Word of God.' He knew his Bible thoroughly, reading it through frequently, and poring over its pages daily for spiritual illumination and exegetical material. It almost passes understanding that a delicate, suffering man, traveling incessantly, burdened with the care of many churches, writing many

letters, praying much, could give so much time to the reading of the Bible. But the Book of God was his delight, and his sermons disclose this fact. They abound in Scripture quotations, their phraseology is flavored with the sacred dialect of the English Bible, biblical illustrations are numerous. He always preached as one who knew not only the form of revelation, but the heart also. He had found the way to the inner shrine of the mystery and dwelt there, and from that holy place declared the oracles of God.

It scarcely need be said that he was an evangelical preacher. He was born of the Evangelical Revival. He felt himself called to be an evangelical minister. His entire ministry shows how faithful he was to this high calling in Christ Jesus. His purposes were evangelical, his manner of life was evangelical, his teachings were evangelical. He came to America to preach the doctrines as held by the Methodists in Great Britain, believing them to be, as he said, the purest of any people now in the world. The Lord had blessed the preaching of these doctrines in England. Asbury had high confidence that the favor of God would rest upon like faithful preaching of the same doctrines in America. Ezekiel Cooper in his 'funeral discourse,' delivered at the request of the Annual Conference in Philadelphia, April 23, 1816, and based upon

the text, 'But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, and patience' (2 Tim. 3. 10), said:

> His doctrines embraced all those divine truths, contained in the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible, to him, was the book of books, and his grand confession of faith. He was careful to regulate all his religious tenets and doctrines by the Book of God, and to discard everything that was incompatible with the divine law and testimony. Mr. Wesley's Sermons, and notes on the Scriptures, and Fletcher's Checks, exemplify his leading doctrines. The articles of religion, in the Form of Discipline, and, what is commonly called, the Apostles' Creed, contain a brief summary of his faith and doctrines. In his public ministry, in his conference communications, and examinations of candidates for the ministry; in his addresses to the societies, in his private and social interviews, and in his sentimental conversations, we have often heard him, instructively and entertainingly, profess, declare, and enforce his opinions and doctrines. We have fully known them.

One may quickly discover what he preached about from a perusal of his Journal. There will be found references to thousands of sermons, the texts of which are given in about seven hundred instances, and outlines in one hundred and seventy-five. The study of Asbury's texts and outlines is a very interesting one. Of the outlines eleven appear in the first volume, covering the years 1771-1786; eighty-seven in the second volume, 1786-1800; and seventy-seven in the

third volume, 1801-1815. Twelve of the texts have each two outlines, and one, three. While Asbury was very much at home in the Old Testament, only forty-one are from that portion of the Bible, and sixteen of these are from Isaiah and the Psalms. From the New Testament he takes one hundred and twenty, twenty-four from the Gospels, eleven from Acts, eighty-one from the Epistles, and four from the Apocalypse. About this same ratio holds where he names his texts, but does not give his method of treatment. He seems not to have followed any plan in the choice of texts. Naturally, he used the same text more than once, some texts very often. Now and then he makes use of the same text on successive days or several times within a short period, and then again months or years later. In Philadelphia in 1809 it was recollected that he had preached on the same subject in the same place in 1771. He had a custom of taking texts from the portion of Scripture which he was reading at the time, and it is easy to discover from his Journal when he was reading First and Second Chronicles, for example, or other scriptures, but he seldom made use of such texts the second time. There are exceptions of course. He was peculiarly apt in the choice of subjects and texts. Hearing that peace had been confirmed between England and America, he says, 'Believing the report to be true,

I took some notice of it while I treated on Acts 10. 36, at brother Clayton's near Halifax, where they were firing their cannons, and rejoicing in their way, on the occasion.' In time of drought in Kentucky he preached from 'If the Lord shut up the heavens that it rain not,' etc. To soldiers, 'And the soldiers came and inquired, and what shall we do?' Boehm relates that he was often startled when he heard him read his text and announce his theme, at his power of adaptation, and gives this incident: 'At a certain place where he was expected they announced him in the newspapers to preach on a special subject. He knew nothing of it before his arrival, and that was just before the service commenced. To their astonishment he read his text, "I speak not by commandment, but by reason *of the forwardness of others,* and to prove the sincerity of your love."'

He was very careful in his observance of Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas, and preached sermons appropriate to those occasions. Such entries as these are common in his Journal:

Being Easter-day, I preached at the Manakintown on Colos. 3. 1–4, with some freedom.

This being Good Friday, I preached from these pathetic words of Christ, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'

Being Christmas day, I preached from 1 Tim. 1. 15:

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' My spirit was at liberty, and we were much blessed, both in preaching and class-meeting. Hitherto the Lord hath helped me both in soul and body, beyond my expectation. May I cheerfully do and suffer all his will, endure to the end, and be eternally saved.

Two years later, in 1777, he uses the same text for his Christmas sermon, and on many occasions through his entire ministry. It was his favorite text, for in at least two places in his Journal he so calls it. One can almost hear the noble preacher exult in his possession. He knew by a blessed experience the truth of the message committed to him, Jesus Christ a personal Saviour from all sin. This is the imperial theme of his long ministry, salvation in Jesus Christ—'The great salvation,' as Bishop Asbury was fond of characterizing it.

Salvation! O the joyful sound!
  What pleasure to our ears!
A sovereign balm for every wound,
  A cordial for our fears.

Another text which he makes use of with almost the same conspicuous frequency sounds the same lofty, joyous note: 'Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent' (Acts 13. 26).

This was the central doctrine of his preaching, salvation a gracious gift. Late in his life, the last year of his journeyings, he gives an outline of his sermon on this text:

> This salvation; the gospel, to be sure; who the author, what the nature, means, conditions, spirituality, and degrees of this salvation; from whom it is sent, by whom, and to whom it is sent. It was sent to Jews first, afterward to the Gentiles, and continued to be sent, and is still sent to the children of men by the written Word, by the ministers of that Word, and by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The consequences of its reception—eternal life; of its rejection—everlasting damnation.

How familiar these paths were to his patient, weary feet! Many, many times had he walked in this delightful grove of the Lord's mercy. He knew every mark and every turn. He was at home on the theme, for it was the study of his life because the delight of his heart. This was the gospel. The cross was the center of it, as it must be of every successful ministry. On the slopes of the Alleghenies, in the swamps of South Carolina, by the Kennebunk in Maine, and on the far Ohio frontier, he lifted the cross 'on which the Prince of glory died,' trumpeting in the ears of sinful men, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

In Asbury's Body of Divinity, repentance, conversion, and regeneration had their places and

were faithfully preached. Sanctification was a constant theme. At one time he laments that he has not preached it oftener, at another he vows to touch upon it in every sermon, and throughout his entire life he is constantly longing for more of the fullness of God. In preaching concerning sanctification he sometimes used the text: 'Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless,' outlining it thus: '1. In justification we have peace; 2. In sanctification we are without spot; 3. In perfect love we are blameless; 4. Wherein we must be diligent.' On the same page of the Journal where the above is found there may be seen another outline, which gives an admirable idea of the way Asbury handled texts and subjects. The occasion was a quarterly meeting, the text, 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood' (Acts 20. 28). 'After showing to whom the charge was given I proceeded to enforce the subject thus: 1. Take heed to your spirits; 2. Take heed to your practice; 3. Take heed to your doctrine; 4. Take heed to the flock: (1) Those that are under deep conviction, (2) Those that are the true believers, (3) Those that are sorely tempted, (4) Those that are groaning for full redemption, and (5) Those

that have backslidden. I then urged the motives to this duty.' Knowing the preacher, you can almost hear him as he importunately, passionately urges them to 'take heed.' Asbury always felt that preaching was serious business. Before him always was the judgment. The day of the Lord was drawing near. The time of reckoning was hastening on, when every man must give an account of the deeds done in the body. It was an 'awful day' to Asbury, as real as his own birthday. In all his preaching it was formidable and frowning like some gigantic cliff. Whenever he preached before judges, as he frequently did, like Wesley he preached on 'The Great Assize.' In New York he writes, 'In the evening I was enabled to preach with power, on the awful subject of the Judgment.' With what solemn sense of responsibility he must have unfolded, as he swung perennially around his great circuit, the revelation which came to Saint John:

> And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Death, judgment, heaven, hell, immortality, eternity were terrible realities, and were faith-

fully portrayed. After death cometh the judgment, but before death there was hope for every man. 'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,' was the God-given appeal ever upon his lips. He preached the fall of man, by original and actual transgression, sinners being altogether born in sin; lost as to strength, and wisdom, and righteousness. But he never failed to portray at the same time the character of Christ, the only Saviour, in Deity, in his humanity, suffering, resurrection, ascension, and mediation, or to unfold the gospel method of salvation.

The effects and results of his preaching were seemingly variable, especially upon himself. Whenever in his Journal he mentions having preached, he usually writes down a diagnosis of his own feelings, or describes the effect upon the people. 'I had very little life in preaching to a few dead souls'; 'the Spirit of the Lord came among the people, and sinners cried aloud for mercy'; 'there was a divine stir in the congregation'; 'a melting season'; 'had a heavy time'; 'a dry time'; 'a dull time'; 'a free, open time'; 'an awful time'; 'a time of comfort'; 'the people felt the word'; 'a warm sermon, at which many were

offended'; 'there was a shaking'; 'I left my hearers as I found them—blind'; 'O how different was it from the effect produced on Tuesday last, when discoursing on the same text!' 'all death! death! death!' are samples of his impressions and sensations. It must not be forgotten in any estimate of Asbury as a preacher that he was ill almost continuously throughout his life, and seldom without pain. At times he was so weak that he had to be carried out and placed upon his horse, and, when the day's journey was at an end, lifted from the horse and carried into the house. Scarcely a day passes that he does not make some mention of suffering. He glories in tribulations. He speaks of sickness as a cross given him to bear. He actually rejoiced in this, for thus he bore in his body the marks of the dying of the Lord Jesus. If Francis Asbury had lived in the days of mediæval Christianity, he also, like Saint Francis of Assisi, would have received the stigmata. No man with his holy purpose counts pain other than joy, if thereby his purpose is the nearer realization. What tempests of concern swept his soul! What understanding of woe drove him forward, what experience of the amazing mercies of God urged his aching feet! 'If we could but see by faith the danger to which poor unpardoned sinners are continually exposed,' he cries, 'if we could but

have a realizing view of that unquenchable fire into which they must be plunged, dying in their present state, how could we rest day or night from using all possible endeavors to prevent their eternal damnation?' What were sufferings, what hardships, what unceasing toils, when souls were perishing, and from the bottomless pit the cries of the lost were ever rising? His heart was fixed, and pain was naught, for since Christ had been wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, he also would die daily that men might be saved. Asbury's preaching is inseparably connected with his many illnesses, his deep melancholy, his mercurial temperament, and his fervid mysticism.

How may Asbury be ranked as a preacher? Was he a great preacher? There seems to be a wide difference of opinion as to his preaching gifts. John Dickins felt that he had effectively disposed of the charge of ambition often urged against Asbury when he said if Asbury had been ambitious, he would never have had men for traveling companions who, in the popular estimation, preached far better than he did. What other inference can be drawn from this than that in the popular mind Asbury was not an outstanding preacher? Benjamin M. Adams told me that Miss Mary Garrettson, the accomplished daughter of Freeborn Garrettson, in whose home

on the Hudson Asbury was a frequent and welcome guest, said it was always noticed that Bishop Asbury in his pulpit ministrations prayed better than he preached. On the other hand, Henry Fowler, in *The American Pulpit,* published in 1856, says: 'Of all Methodist preachers, Bishop Asbury stands at the head, if, indeed, he does not rank first in importance, of all American preachers.' Likewise, Philip Schaff, in his introduction to Lange's *Commentary on Matthew,* ranks Asbury among the eloquent preachers of America. But was he a really great preacher?

He was a troublesome preacher, at least enough so to be fined for the exercise of his gifts. But was he an extraordinary preacher? He did not so estimate himself. Lednum relates that he often said he had raised up many a son in the gospel who could outpreach him, but never one who could outsing him. I think this was probably true as to his preaching. Early Methodism produced many mighty preachers. Jesse Lee was a powerful preacher, so was Nicholas Snethen, and William McKendree, and George Roberts, and Ezekiel Cooper. Was Asbury also an unusual preacher? Boehm, Asbury's traveling companion for a longer time than any other man, thought so. 'It has been supposed,' he writes in his *Reminiscences,* 'that he was an inferior preacher, though superior as a governor. But this is a mis-

take. I have heard him over fifteen hundred times. His sermons were scripturally rich. He was a well-instructed scribe, "bringing out of his treasury things new and old." He was a good expounder of the Word of God, giving the meaning of the writer, the mind of the Spirit. He was wise in his selection of texts. There was a rich variety in his sermons. No tedious sameness; no repeating old stale truths. He could be a son of thunder and consolation. There was variety both in matter and manner. He was great at camp meetings, on funeral occasions, and at ordinations. I have heard him preach fifty ordination sermons, and they were among the most impressive I have ever heard.' This is expert testimony. One who has listened to fifteen hundred sermons from any man has earned the right to an opinion. Asbury was not a brilliant preacher like Summerfield, or Maffitt, or Matthew Simpson, and yet he sometimes moved men as mightily as did they. When men speak of the marvelous power of Simpson they not infrequently mention as evidence of his power that by some matchless climax he would lift his entranced hearers from their seats. Asbury could not approach that greatest preacher of his century in magnetic eloquence, but there were occasions when under the rush of his utterance people sprang to their feet as if summoned to the judgment bar of

God. If such power constitutes a preacher great, then Asbury was a great preacher.

He was not as scholarly a preacher as Wilbur Fisk or Stephen Olin, yet he knew the message which it was given him to declare quite as well as did they, and announced it with as marked results. He was not an oratorical preacher like Bascom, but he had a soul aflame and the light was seen and the heat was felt. He sometimes disappointed the expectations of his hearers, and deliberately too. 'The people thought I must speak like thunder to be a great preacher,' he said; 'I shall not throw myself into an unnatural heat or overstrained exertions.' He was not one to strive for effects, but for results. He was ardent, enthusiastic, with glowing lips and a throbbing heart. It is interesting to hear him characterize his own style: 'Now that my mind is in a great measure lightened of its load of thought and labor for the Conference, I feel uncommon light and energy in preaching: I am not prolix; neither am I tame; I am rapid, and nothing freezes on my lips.' Was Asbury a great preacher? If a mind acted upon by the Holy Spirit, if a heart suffused with spiritual passion, if a life surcharged with gospel dynamics—if these, flowing into speech as molten iron is poured into prepared forms, constitute a preacher great, then Asbury was a great preacher. If to speak

with authority as the accredited messenger of God; to have credentials which bear the seal of heaven; to have a voice keyed to the theme of the centuries; if when he lifted the trumpet to his lips the Almighty blew the blast; if to be conscious of an ever-present sense of God, God the Summoner, God the Anointing One, God the Judge, and to project it into speech which would make his hearers tremble, smite them with terror, and cause them to fall as dead men; if to be and do all this would entitle a man to be called a great preacher, then Asbury *was* a great preacher.

CHAPTER XI

THE CARE OF ALL THE CHURCHES

SUCCESSFUL as Francis Asbury was as an evangelist, remarkable as a preacher, he was equally distinguished as an ecclesiastic. It has been claimed for Wesley that he had a genius for organization as marked as that of Richelieu. The same may be said of Asbury. If Washington was a statesman, so also was this pioneer bishop. When he came to America it was as a churchman with a deep-rooted regard for the Established Church as an organization, and this regard for organization showed itself in the development of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His mind was of an orderly type. Order was his passion. It was natural, therefore, that he should show marked skill as an administrator, and be regarded as the peer of any man on the American continent as an organizer and overseer. This will always be his distinction, the crown of his achievement. Historians will base their final estimate of him not upon his preaching, nor even his sainthood, but upon his outstanding qualities of leadership. Wesley early recognized his abilities in this direc-

tion, and when he had been in America but a year—he was only twenty-seven years of age—appointed him to be leader of the work in the colonies. This designation as assistant, 'the vice-gerent of Wesley,' placed him in charge of all the preachers, including Boardman and Pilmoor. The effect of his strong guiding and repressing hand was immediately felt. Not only had he the genius to lead, but he had the will to govern. Probably more than any man in the early days of American Methodism Asbury was a lover of discipline. He saw its value, he appreciated its necessity He lamented the absence of a gift for it in any of his preachers. 'On my return,' he writes, 'some of the members appeared a little refractory to discipline, but without discipline we should be as a rope of sand, so that it must be enforced, let who will be displeased.' Unable to come to America, as Captain Webb urged at the English Conference in 1773, Wesley selected Thomas Rankin, a clergyman some seven or eight years Asbury's senior, an earnest, ardent preacher, to come to America as an assistant with full powers to act in his name, thus superseding for a brief time, as it proved, the young leader appointed the year previous. When Rankin arrived, Asbury wrote, 'To my great comfort arrived Mr Rankin, Mr. Shadford, Mr. Yearby, and Captain Webb,' and when he had heard

Rankin preach from the text, 'I have set before thee an open door,' he entered in his Journal, 'He will not be admired as a preacher, but as disciplinarian he will fill his place.' It was this that established Rankin in Asbury's esteem, though later they did not always agree on matters of import. Discipline was the great thing in Asbury's mind, and therefore he welcomed Rankin and Shadford, who had come 'to lay the ax at the root of the tree of irregularity.' Asbury was ever against irregularities in ecclesiastical affairs, against laxness of faith and indefiniteness of assent. There can be no question that when he arrived in America the Methodists were in a bad way. The preaching of the gospel was important, but quite as important at this period was the gathering of awakened and converted men into well-disciplined societies. When Mr. Wesley had occasion to speak of the comparative failure of Whitefield's labors in America, he said in substance that it was small wonder, inasmuch as it was a true saying common in the ancient church, 'The soul and the body make a man, and the spirit and discipline make a Christian,' and that those who were influenced by Mr. Whitefield's preaching had no discipline at all. Asbury, believing as firmly in discipline as Wesley, and feeling its importance quite as much, when he discovered how generally it had

been neglected in America, immediately set to work to straighten matters out and to establish societies in accordance with Wesleyan rules. In New York he summoned the classes and spoke plainly to them; he criticized class leaders and demanded that they be Methodists! A few days after his appointment to Philadelphia he writes: 'Preached with some sharpness. In the evening I met the society and kept the door.' He wanted to scrutinize those who came in and guard against the exit of any who might resent his sharpness. A little later he writes:

> Many were offended at my shutting them out of the society meeting, as they had been greatly indulged before, but this does not trouble me. While I stay the rules must be attended to, and I cannot suffer myself to be guided by half-hearted Methodists. An elderly friend told me very gravely that the opinion of the people was much changed within a few days about 'Methodists,' and that the Quakers and other dissenters had laxed their discipline, that none but the Roman Catholics kept it with strictness, but these things did not move me.

And they never did move him. He had a face as of flint against disorder and irregularity. Most noticeable is his constant contention for regularity. 'To-day,' he says, 'I wrote to John Dickins, to Philip Gatch, Edward Dromgoole, and to William Glendenning, urging them, if possible, to prevent a separation among the

preachers in the South—that is, Virginia and North Carolina—and I entertain great hopes that the breach will be healed; if not, the consequences may be bad.'

Asbury's strict adherence to the Wesleyan plan, his loyal devotion to Mr. Wesley, his strong sense of regularity, and his skill as an ecclesiastic are all shown throughout the 'sacramental controversy' which was waged with such bitterness during the Revolutionary War and threatened to split the Church. This is not the place for any extended statement concerning that controversy, important as it was. The more closely the situation is studied, however, the more evident it is that the contention of many of the preachers that they should be allowed to administer the sacraments to the people who were as sheep without a shepherd, the clergymen of the Established Church having all deserted their flocks, was both natural and Christian. Asbury, however, was opposed to this. Notwithstanding the majority of the preachers, with the approval, it is said, of the societies with which they were connected, at the Conference in Fluvanna, Virginia, in 1779, determined to separate themselves from the English Church, Asbury did not flinch. He met with the preachers of the North the following year, at Lovely Lane Chapel, in Baltimore, and together the few preachers there reaffirmed their purpose

to continue in close connection with the Established Church, and to receive the sacraments in the regular way They recorded their unanimous disapproval of the step which the brethren in Virginia had taken, and declared that the offenders could not be looked upon 'as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us until they should retract and return to uniformity.' In a personal letter to Wesley, September 20, 1783, Asbury explained his attitude to the question in this sensible way:

> I reverence the ordinances of God and attend them when I have opportunity. But I clearly see that they have been made the tools of division and separation for these three last centuries. We have joined with us at this time those who have been Presbyterians, Dutch, and English, Lutherans, Mennonites, Low Dutch, and Baptists. If we preach up ordinances to these people, we should add, 'If they are to be had, and if not there can be no guilt.' If we do any other way, we shall drive them back to their old churches that have disowned them and who will do all they can to separate them from us. . We have labored and suffered much to keep the people and preachers together, and if I am thought worthy to keep my place, I should be willing to labor and suffer till death for peace and union. If I should be spared, I purpose to write from Baltimore, and then I will send you a parcel of letters and papers that you may see how that division arose, spread, and was healed.

Had he been less of a disciplinarian, that

question of the sacrament would have been the rock on which the Church had split; but shrewd, tactful, conciliatory, patient, and firm, he guided the ship safely through the storms and into the harbor.

What were Asbury's relations to Wesley? The latter had named him an assistant, and later designated him as a joint superintendent with Dr. Coke, for the work in America. Did Asbury hold himself as subordinate to Wesley? He has been charged with personal ambition and with usurping authority. Was there ground for it? Did he arrogate to himself rights and privileges, such as Mr. Wesley claimed for himself? I find nothing in his Journal nor in his acts which would suggest other than for John Wesley, his spiritual father and his ecclesiastical superior, the highest esteem and affection. He was more than generous in his estimate of him. 'I read Mr. Wesley's *Journal*,' he writes; 'Ah, how little it makes me feel, the faithfulness and diligence of this great man of God!' Again: 'I read the latter part of Mr. Wesley's *Journal*. How great and unceasing were his labors! How various, how comprehensive and just are his observations on men, women, modes, manners, doctrines, opinions, authors, and things!' Again he writes: 'I am reading Saurin's fifth volume. He is great in his way, but it is not Mr. Wesley's way, which I take

to be the *more excellent* way.' 'I received a letter this day,' he records, 'from that venerable father in Christ, Mr. Wesley.' Another letter comes to him, 'written by my dear brother Wesley in Ireland, with his usual plainness and honesty of heart.' And when in 1791 he learns of Mr. Wesley's death, he enters in his Journal:

The solemn news reached our ears that the public papers had announced the death of that dear man of God, John Wesley. He died in his own house in London, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, after preaching the gospel sixty-four years. When we consider his plain and nervous writings; his uncommon talent for sermonizing and journalizing: that he had such a steady flow of animal spirits; so much of the spirit of government in him; his knowledge as an observer; his attainments as a scholar, his experience as a Christian, I conclude his equal is not to be found among all the sons he hath brought up, nor his superior among all the sons of Adam he may have left behind. Brother Coke was sunk in spirit, and wishes to hasten home immediately. For myself, notwithstanding my long absence from Mr. Wesley, and a few unpleasant expressions in some of the letters the dear old man has written to me (occasioned by the misrepresentation of others), I feel the stroke most sensibly; and, I expect, I shall never read his works without reflecting on the loss which the Church of God and the world has sustained by his death.

From first to last his relation to Mr. Wesley was that of a son, not of a rival. When peace had been concluded between America and Great Brit-

ain, Asbury, the one English Methodist preacher who had remained true to his mission on this great continent, urged Wesley to come to America to plan for the development of Methodism in the United States. In one of the letters which he wrote he said: 'We are greatly in need of help. A minister and such preachers as you can fully recommend will be very acceptable. Without your recommendation we shall receive none. But nothing is so pleasing to me, sir, as the thought of seeing you here, which is the ardent desire to those with me in America.' This is indicative of the spirit which he manifested toward Wesley as long as Wesley lived.

Wesley's feeling toward Asbury is admirably shown in this unpublished letter to him, dated, London, November 25, 1787, and reading as follows:

MY DEAR BROTHER: A glorious work indeed God has been working for several years, and is still working in America. But one thing has often given me concern:—God is visiting the progeny of Japhet (the English) who now *dwell in the tents of Shem,* according to the prophecy of Noah. Nay he does

"The servile progeny of Ham
Seize as the purchase of his blood."

But in the meantime, the progeny of Shem, the Indians, seem to be quite forgotten! How few of these have seen the light of the glory of God, since the English first settled among them! And now

scarce one in fifty of them among whom we settled, perhaps scarce one in an hundred of them are left alive! Does it not seem as if God had designed all the Indian nations, not for reformation, but destruction? How many millions of them (in South and North America) have already died in their sins! Will neither God nor man have compassion on these outcasts of men? Undoubtedly with man it is impossible to help them. But is it too hard for God? O that he would arise and maintain his own cause! That He would first stir up the hearts of some of his children to make the conversion of these heathens also matter of solemn prayer. And then

"Eternal Providence, exceeding thought,
Where none appears, will make itself a way."

Pray ye likewise the Lord of the harvest, and he will send out more labourers into his harvest. But beware you do not grudge two brethren out of an hundred, to help your northern brethren. It is enough that we send out two brethren to your one, considering the enormous expense. But let us all do what we can, and we do enough. And see that no shyness or coldness ever creep in between you and Your affectionate friend and brother, J. Wesley.[1]

In 1773 the first American Methodist Conference began in Philadelphia July 14. Asbury was detained in New York and did not reach the seat of the Conference until the following day. He was the tenth member, all of them Europeans. The Minutes of that first Conference show clearly that Asbury and the other

[1] Drew MSS.

London
Nov 25. 1787

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Seeing as the purchase of his blood. But in the mean time, the Progeny of Shem, the Indians, seem to be quite forgotten. How few of these have seen the light of the glory of God since the English first settled among them! And now scarce one in fifty of them among whom we settled, perhaps scarce one in

To

16

The Revd Mr Asbury

at Mr Wells's Merchant
No 11½ near the Exchange
Charleston South Carolina

To be preserved
carefully, like
the originals.

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Your Affectionate Friend & Brother

J Wesley

preachers had no thought of breaking from the parent society. It was asked, 'Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that Conference to extend to the preacher and the people in America as well as Great Britain and Ireland?' And to this question they all answered, 'Yes,' as they did also to these other two questions: 'Ought not the doctrine and the discipline as contained in the Minutes to be the sole rule of our conduct who labor in connection with Mr. Wesley in America?' and 'If so, does it not follow that if any preachers deviate from the Minutes, we can have no fellowship with them until they change their conduct?' As Hurst, in his *History of Methodism,* says, 'These enactments established formally the connection of the American societies with their English brethren, acknowledged the authority of the British Conference, and bound the American preachers to conform to the Wesleyan practices as printed in the Minutes.' But they did more than this. They established the relation of Rankin and Shadford, Strawbridge and Asbury, to the great leader of the Methodist hosts. Any study of Asbury as an ecclesiastic, at least before the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, must, therefore, be in the light of this close, almost filial, relation to John Wesley.

It is true that later he did couple himself with

Mr. Wesley in the exercise of authority—'If Mr. Wesley and myself have assumed a power we could have no evangelical right to' is a sentence in a letter written by him to the Rev. R. W. Sale. It is true also that Mr. Wesley had some apprehensions concerning him and other preachers in America. He was ever jealous of his preeminence as the autocrat of all Methodism. In the famous letter which Wesley wrote to 'My dear Franky,' September 20, 1788, chiding him for allowing himself to be called 'bishop,' a letter which is invariably cited as proof that Wesley ordained Coke a 'superintendent,' not 'a bishop,' Wesley said:

> There is indeed a wide difference between the relation wherein you stand to the Americans and the relation wherein I stand to all Methodists. You are the elder brother to the American Methodists; I am, under God, the father of the whole family.[1]

But would not Asbury have been the very last person to dispute this!

Even after the organization of the Church, Wesley undertook to administer affairs in the United States. He directed that a General Conference of all the preachers be held in 1787 and that Richard Whatcoat be made a superintendent, but this was not acceptable to the American Methodists, and the Conference was not held.

[1] Tyerman, *Life and Times of Wesley*, vol. iii, p. 438.

He directed that Freeborn Garrettson be ordained a superintendent for Nova Scotia, but it was not done. He was painfully grieved that his name was left out of the American Minutes, and let the fact be known, but this was done by the preachers and not by Bishop Asbury. At Charleston, in March, 1789, Asbury 'received a bitter pill from one of my greatest friends,' namely, a letter from the aged founder of Methodism, the last he ever received from him, in which Wesley bluntly and almost brutally accused his son in the gospel of striving to make himself great. What sorrow this must have brought him! How unjust the accusation must have seemed! But Asbury surely must have recalled that Wesley was now eighty-six years of age, which doubtless accounted for the stricture. And to the very end his love for Wesley was unbounded, and he showed him every consideration. Asbury was not ambitious to exercise authority. His ambition was to do God's will. The power which he possessed was derived from his coworkers. It was not Mr. Wesley who made him general superintendent, but the preachers. Before the Christmas Conference was thought of, or Mr. Wesley had reached his momentous conclusion as to the work in America, which resulted in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Edward Dromgoole wrote to Wesley:

The preachers at present are united to Mr. Asbury, and esteem him very highly in love for his works sake, and earnestly desire his continuance on the continent during his long life; and to act as he does at present, to wit, to superintend the whole work and go through all the circuits once a year. He is now well acquainted with the country, with the preachers and people, and has a large share in the affections of both; therefore they would not willingly part with him, or submit to any other to act in his place, until they have good proof of his integrity.[1]

May it not be that Wesley's designation of Asbury as general superintendent was influenced possibly by this knowledge of the desire of the American preachers? They had become so attached to him, they were so firmly persuaded of his devotion to the American work, and of his ability to direct it, that if they could have had choice of either Wesley or Asbury, in my opinion they would have chosen Francis Asbury.

In the administration of the affairs of the Church Asbury undoubtedly was strong willed. What successful leader of men has not been a man of will? Wellington was the 'iron duke'; Wesley was charged with being a tyrant, so also was Asbury.

'I heard,' he writes, 'there was a conference appointed at Reese's chapel, in Charlotte county, Virginia, to form what they call a free constitution,

[1] *Arminian Magazine,* 1791, p. 219.

and a pure Church; and to reject me and my creatures. . . . Whenever the people are unwilling to receive us, and think they can do better, we will quietly withdraw from them; and if those who wish the change can serve them better than we have done, well. Perhaps some of them may think with ——, in Georgia, that I am the greatest villain on the continent; I bid such adieu, and appeal to the bar of God. I have no time to contend, having better work to do: if we lose some children, God will give us more. Ah! this is the mercy, the justice of some, who, under God, owe their all to me.'

Asbury's plan for the establishment of a Council, to act for the Church, composed of a limited number of members, and invested with extraordinary powers, and which met but twice, has been cited as proof of his autocratic tendencies, but it seems to me rather an experiment in organization. The Church had but recently been given a name. The work was spreading rapidly, new societies were being formed, the Conferences were becoming more numerous—eleven being held in 1789—the difficulties of administration were increasing, and Asbury, with his fine administrative sense, was feeling after some plan by which the Conferences and the societies could be bound together. The one center around which all societies and Conferences revolved was himself, his personality. Bishop Coke never had the grip upon the American situation which Asbury did. There was no such

devotion to him as to his colleague. I have thought that perhaps this explained his lack of frankness with Bishop Asbury, for without Asbury's knowledge Bishop Coke carried on a somewhat extensive correspondence with the authorities of the Protestant Episcopal Church, looking to the consolidation of the two bodies. Not only did Coke not consult with Asbury, but he was even anxious that it should be kept from him. So far as Asbury was concerned, there was no justification for such a course, his affection for him being open and generous. 'To-morrow my dear Coke sails for Europe,' he writes; and again; 'This day Doctor Coke is waiting to sail for Ireland. Strangers to the delicacies of Christian friendship know little or nothing of the pain of parting.' Coke was a man of conspicuous talents and influence. Stevens says of him:

> In travel and preaching he became as indefatigable as Wesley or Whitefield. He was to traverse continually the United Kingdom, the United States, and the West Indies. He was to have virtual charge, for years, of the Irish Conference, presiding at its sessions oftener than Wesley himself. He was to win the title of 'Foreign Minister of Methodism.' He was to cross the Atlantic eighteen times, defraying himself his expenses; to organize, under Wesley, the Methodist Episcopal Church, as its first bishop; to originate the constitutional organization of English Methodism by Wesley's Deed of Declaration; to found the Wes-

MINUTES;

TAKEN AT A

COUNCIL

OF THE

BISHOP and delegated ELDERS

OF THE

Methodist-Episcopal Church:

HELD AT BALTIMORE,
IN THE
STATE OF MARYLAND,
DECEMBER 1, 1790.

BALTIMORE:
PRINTED BY W GODDARD AND J. ANGELL,
IN MARKET STREET.

M, DCC, XC.

Photographed from the Original in the Library of Drew Theological Seminary

TITLE PAGE OF THE MINUTES OF THE SECOND COUNCIL

leyan Missions in the West Indies, in Africa, in Asia, in England, Wales, and Ireland; to represent, in his own person, down to his death, the whole missionary operations of Methodism, as their official and almost their sole director; lavishing upon this his affluent fortune, and giving more money to religion than any other Methodist, if not any other Protestant, of his times.[1]

Now, Francis Asbury was not as broadly educated, nor as widely traveled, but he knew American Methodism better, and his was the dominant personality. A writer trying to explain some of Coke's actions, in which certain undesirable traits of character were discerned, says: 'He was in a personal presence that had become awesome to him. To eat, and sleep, and travel with Asbury was to feel the strange magnetism of his reverent behavior, his persuasive logic, his unquestioned sincerity, and his dominating will.' Asbury was a leader by divine right. Small in stature, he nevertheless was a Saul among his brethren. Otherwise William McKendree, or Jesse Lee, or Freeborn Garrettson might have taken his kingdom from him; otherwise James O'Kelly or William Hammett would have dethroned him; otherwise the preachers would not have received their appointments at his hands.

Asbury's lot was by no means an easy one. His administration of affairs was repeatedly

[1] Stevens, *History of American Methodism*, p. 179.

attacked. Obstacles were put in his way. O'Kelly complained of him to Wesley, resenting his exercise of authority He also wrote directly to Asbury: 'I received a letter from the presiding elder of this district, James O'Kelly: he makes heavy complaints of my power, and bids me stop for one year, or he must use his influence against me.' And how he did try to use his influence against him, but with as little effect as when the sea dashes against the impregnable rocks! O'Kelly continued his attacks, until finally he withdrew from the connection after the General Conference of 1792, and even after this he used every possible influence to rally to his standard of revolt preachers and people of some of the regions through which Asbury made his journeys. But the great-heartedness of Asbury and his genius as a leader are shown in his treatment of O'Kelly, the recalcitrant. 'We agreed,' he writes, 'to let our displeased brethren still preach among us, and as Mr. O'Kelly is almost worn out, the Conference acceded to my proposal of giving him forty pounds per annum, as when he traveled in connection.' There is no malice, no resentment here. Asbury was too large a man to have such feelings toward any of his preachers or anyone else.

That in the care of all the churches he exercised much the same authority as Wesley did in Great

Britain, I see no reason to doubt. He had authority, used it, and did not apologize. When his right to use it was questioned, he was ready with his answer:

I will tell the world what I rest my authority upon. 1, divine authority. 2, seniority in America. 3, the election of the General Conference. 4, my ordination by Thomas Coke, William Philip Otterbein, German Presbyterian minister, Richard Whatcoat, and Thomas Vasey. 5, because the signs of an apostle have been seen in me.

Could any man dispute these facts? But in his administration as bishop, time and again he expressed his willingness to sink himself in the common good. Take this single instance:

Some individuals among the preachers have their jealousies about my influence in the Conference. I gave the matter wholly up to them, and Dr. Coke, who presided [he writes in his Journal]. Meantime I sent them the following letter:

My Dear Brethren: Let my absence give you no pain—Dr. Coke presides. I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself am to be governed: I have only to obey and execute. I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers. Are you sure, that, if you please yourselves, the people will be as fully satisfied? They often say, 'Let us have such a preacher'; and sometimes, 'We will not have such a preacher—we will sooner

pay him to stay at home.' Perhaps I must say, 'his appeal forced him upon you.' I am one—ye are many. I am as willing to serve you as ever. I want not to sit in any man's way. I scorn to solicit votes. I am a trembling, poor creature to hear praise or dispraise. Speak your minds freely; but remember, you are only making laws for the present time. It may be, that as in some other things, so in this, a future day may give you further light.

What a noble *apologia* that is, and what shrewd wisdom this letter reveals! 'Not in all the annals of Methodism, including the wonderful and voluminous letters of Wesley, is there one comparable with this.' [1]

That Asbury was tyrannical in the stationing of his preachers I can find no least evidence. For the most part the preachers expressed their willingness to go where they were sent. Of one of his Conferences he said: 'There were twenty-five preachers present. I had some difficulties respecting stations, but there was a willingness among the brethren to go where they were appointed, and all was well.' Of another: 'We had great peace and not one preacher objected to his station.' His carefulness is shown in the statement which follows this last one—'We sent an apology to our brethren in Petersburg for not having held Conference there according to ap-

[1] Buckley, *Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 74.

pointment, for reasons already assigned.' On another occasion he says: 'I wrote a plan for stationing and desired the dear preachers to be as I am in the work. I have no interest, no passions in their appointments. My only aim is to provide for the flock of Christ.' And I believe this to have been the case. At the General Conference in 1792 his power to station the preachers without an appeal was debated at great length, and finally reestablished by a very large majority. As a rule, it was as he said, the preachers took their stations with the simple-heartedness of little children. Sometimes the boys gave him trouble. 'I am grieved to have to do with the boys,' he writes; 'Hugh Porter had written to this town about a station, and added to the mischief he had formerly done. I shall take care of these youngsters.' Human nature is much the same in every century.

That Asbury loved power for power's sake, or that he was politically ambitious, I do not believe; that he administered the affairs of the Church with an iron hand and an indomitable will, is unmistakably true, but that it was for his own advantage or the advancement of his personal interests, all the evidence is against this. Unaffected, sincere, humble as a child, simple, and without self-consciousness, he sought not what men could give him, but the men them-

selves. 'That which gave him such a commanding influence over others was the confidence which he had inspired in his wisdom and integrity. The manner in which he had deported himself from the time he first landed on our shores, convinced all with whom he had intercourse that he "sought not his own but them," and that the high ends he aimed to accomplish were the present and future salvation of immortal beings. His deadness to the world, to human applause, to riches and worldly honors, and his deep devotion to God made an impression upon all who bore witnesses to his spirit and conduct, that he was actuated by the purest and most elevated motives and views. This pervading impression wrought that confidence in the uprightness of his intentions and wisdom of his plans, which gave him such a control over both preachers and people as enabled him to discharge the high trusts confided to him, with so much facility and to such general satisfaction.'[1] It may be said with absolute confidence that there was nothing in his career from the first, and nothing to which he gave his sanction, in the constitution of the Church, that was tarnished by the slightest touch of self. He never affected to ignore the immense power with which his office invested him. 'There is not,' he said, 'nor, indeed, in my judg-

[1] Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 401.

ment, can there be a perfect equality between a constant president and those over whom he always presides.' 'Yet we never find him pleading the rights of his office *in his own* interests. We see him precisely the same simple man in the episcopal chair as in the log cabin in the wilderness; never exacting services of his brethren as due to him in virtue of his official relation to them, but willing, rather, to be the servant of all; not even allowing himself to receive that "double honor" of which "the elder that ruleth well" "is counted worthy," but content to the end of his days with an annual "allowance" of twenty-five dollars from each Conference, for his personal expenses, and accepting occasional gifts of money from his wealthy friends, only in order that he might have to give to the needy.'

How genuinely simple Bishop Asbury was, with what truly apostolic spirit he discharged the duties of his office, may be seen from this beautiful incident given by William M. Dallam in a letter to Rev. Robert Emory: A worthy local preacher, Brother G——, having been elected for ordination, set off with a friend, Brother R——, to meet the bishop at Lyons, New York, before the adjournment of the Genesee Conference. In this, however, they were disappointed. They met the bishop at Geneva, where he was designing to take lodgings for the night. Instead of attend-

ing to the ordination that evening, he proposed, as they were to travel in the same direction the next day, to attend to the solemn service at the house of a friend between the lakes where it was his intention to call about noon. The bishop enjoined the necessity of being ready to embark at seven o'clock. Unfortunately the horse of the deacon-elect broke from the inclosure during the night, and before he and his associate could recover him the bishop had begun his journey. After pursuing him some miles they overtook him about the middle of the day. On coming to an opening where the horses could graze, they dismounted, the bishop being furnished with such a supply of provision as was convenient for him. After dividing his morsel with his wayfaring companions, and resting a little, he proceeded to the holy ordinance. The natural scenery with which they were surrounded, their remote seclusion, and the importance of the occasion, all contributed to heighten the sublimity of the exercises, and G—— was set apart for the holy office by the imposition of holy hands while standing upon that ancient altar of God which God erected before he said 'Let us make man,' and with none on earth to witness the interesting scene but his friend R—— and the feathered songsters which sang among the branches while the prelate prayed. The bishop made out the parchment,

and dated it 'On the eastern bank of the Seneca Lake.' They parted to meet again on the other side of Jordan.[1]

There are many things which show how great a leader Asbury was. He secured, for example, a circulation of preachers. In 1771 he confessed; 'I have not yet the thing which I seek, a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and do what I do faithfully as to God. I expect trouble is at hand; this I expected when I left England, and I am willing to suffer, yea, to die, sooner than betray so good a cause by any means. It will be a hard matter to stand against all opposition as an iron pillar, strong and steadfast as a wall of brass, but through Christ strengthening me, I can do all things.' A little later he laments: 'I find that the preachers have their friends in the cities and care not to leave them. For my part, I desire to be faithful to God and man.' Asbury was against soft places for preachers; he was against the tendency to settle rather than to be itinerant ministers. At one time he writes: 'I do not find such harmony as I could wish for. There were some debates among the preachers in this Conference relative to the conduct of some who had manifested a desire to abide in the cities and live like gentle-

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

men.' That Asbury's policy of a circulation of preachers was a good one the statistics of those early years, and of the later years also, will clearly show. When, for example, the second Conference of the American preachers met in Philadelphia, in 1774, the reports from the circuits showed that the circuits had risen from six to ten and the membership had nearly doubled.

It was Asbury too who made Methodism connectional in its spirit. The first American Conference established this definitely and finally. The societies which had been planted in the lanes of New York, the hamlets of New Jersey, and the Maryland backwoods, by the carpenters, farmers, and men of business, with or without parchments from Mr. Wesley, but invariably under God's high commission, were henceforth to be one body. The bond that held them to Wesley held them together, and from that day in July, 1773, when those preachers set out for their respective circuits, Methodism in America has been strongly connectional.[1] And that it was thus established, and was increasingly connectional throughout all the years of Asbury's oversight, was due to his spirit and to his conception of the purpose of the gospel and the mission of the Methodist Church.

Asbury's relations to his men reveal the secret

[1] Hurst, *History of Methodism*, vol. iv, p. 105.

of his success as an administrator. He seems to have had a marvelous knowledge of men—powers of discrimination that always belong to leaders of men. Boehm in his admirable *Reminiscences*—Boehm was for a long time Asbury's traveling companion—says that 'he would sit in Conference and look from under his dark and heavy eyebrows, reading countenances and studying the character and constitution of the preachers, not only for the sake of the Church but for their own sakes. He would say to me: "Henry, Brother A.—or B.—has been too long on the rice plantations, or on the Peninsula. He looks pale; health begins to decline; he must go to the high lands." The preacher would be removed and know not the cause, and the next year come to Conference with health improved and constitution invigorated.' Stories of his kindness to his preachers are innumerable. At the session of the Western Conference, in 1806, some of the preachers were in need, being destitute of clothing, so Asbury parted with his watch, his coat, and his shirt. The needs of his men and their sufferings always wore upon him. 'I found the poor preachers indifferently clad, with emaciated bodies, and subject to hard fare, yet I hope they are rich in faith.' The tenderness of his sympathies with his men was shown also, as has been related by one writer, in the habit he had of visit-

ing the graves of his deceased friends. When he came into a neighborhood where some dear friend, whom he had left a year before in good health, had departed this life, he invariably expressed a desire to visit his grave. In the hour of twilight he bent his solitary steps toward the 'house of silence,' to hold communion in spirit with the dead. Asbury's sympathies never lost their fine edge; but however strong his love for his men, he nevertheless spoke with the utmost frankness and used great plainness of speech. 'Heard Brother W preach,' he says, 'and thought it my duty to blame him for speaking against the knowledge of salvation.' 'I brought Isaac Rawlins to some acknowledgment, and appointed him to ride Pittsylvania, New Hope, and Tar River till Conference.' 'I had great reason to fear from former and later information that Brother —— was not as useful nor as acceptable here as I could wish. From a sense of duty I mentioned this to him with great tenderness. As first it proved some trial to him.' Thomas Ware says of Bishop Asbury, 'He gave me some severe rebukes, but, nevertheless, appointed me a presiding elder.' Dr. Bangs relates having been at an ordination service when the bishop, evidently displeased at the manner of dress of one of the candidates, and perceiving, as it was thought, an air of self-confidence in another, sud-

denly burst out in a strain of rebuke, mingled with the tenderest expostulation, which created in all who heard him a sensation of abhorrence against everything beneath the dignity, the gravity, and the holiness of the ministerial character.[1] His uppermost concern was for the spiritual life of the preachers. For years it was his invariable habit, day by day, to pray for every one of his ministers by name. After the famous battle of the Ford of the Granicus, those who had been wounded in the fierce struggle of Alexander's cavalry, led by himself, received, it is said, the personal attention and solicitude of the king. He went from one to the other, looked at their wounds, inquired particularly as to how they had been received, and allowed them what is dear to the soldier's heart, and especially to that of the Greek soldier, 'to tell their tales and brag of their deeds.' His leadership was a very personal thing. So was Asbury's.

No man without a perfect genius for administration could have done such an endless variety of things, and accomplished so much. Here he tarries for a little, 'trying what can be done toward building a house of worship'; at another place he finds 'it necessary to change some official men'; he hurries to Baltimore, being 'in great haste to settle the business of the Book Concern';

[1] Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. ii, p. 409.

he baptizes four adults by immersion, 'they being persuaded that this was the most proper mode'; he goes to Abingdon, 'to settle our college business, and took a bond for the conveyance of the ground'; now he is occupied in 'collecting money for books'; then he finds it 'necessary to stop brother Hickson from going to Nova Scotia'; he meets 'leaders and trustees, and after some explanation, settled matters relative to singing in public worship'; he receives with gratitude 'some relief for my poor orphans'; now he spends 'some time in visiting from house to house and begging for the college'; then he engages in conversation with some Indian chiefs concerning a school he was trying to establish among them; he examines the young men who offered themselves as candidates for the ministry; at a Conference at Albany he gave each preacher an opportunity to tell what the Lord had done for him during the year, considered with them 'our doctrines, and whether our faith was still firm in those which were believed and taught among us, appointed Jonathan Newman as a missionary to the whites and Indians on the frontiers,' and then propounded 'a few questions of theology, namely,

1. How are we to deal with sinners?
2. How should we treat with mourners?
3. Which way should we address hypocrites?
4. How can we deal with backsliders?
5. What is the best for believers?'

If these are questions of theology, it is most surely *practical* theology. Some of our present-day Conferences might well consider such questions of theology! He begins the administration of the Lord's Supper, but discovering that the wine provided 'was in reality brandy, desisted'; officiating at the laying of the corner stone of a new meetinghouse, he himself has to lend a hand to put the 'mighty stone' in place; here he averts a schism—and now he writes 'Dr. Coke, advising against the British brethren going to law with certain contentious parties'; now he calls 'on his Excellency, Governor Rodney,' and next he gives his approval to the expulsion of a troublesome member from one of the societies; he holds Conferences, more than two hundred, he ordains deacons and elders, four thousand of them, stations the preachers, writes letters, a thousand a year, listens to complaints, instructs the children, receives anonymous letters, distributes Bibles, keeps his Journal, is misunderstood, maligned, traduced, and all the while he is 'kept in peace.'

He was a missionary advocate, before there was any Missionary Society. As early as 1786, only two years after the organization of the Church, he writes in his Journal, being in Baltimore:

I preached three times on Sunday and made a

collection to defray the expenses of sending missionaries to the Western settlements. I spoke twice on the same subject through the course of the week.

At the same time three missionaries were sent to Nova Scotia. Is it just, therefore, to Asbury and his colaborers, or historically true, to ignore their active interest in missionary enterprises, and date the origin of our missionary work as late as 1816, which year the printed appeal of Asbury's 'Mite Subscription,' the last he ever drew up and circulated, sets forth that the purpose of the fund is not simply to relieve needy preachers, but 'to enable us to send out German, French, and Spaniard missionaries,' or from the organization of the Missionary Society in 1819?

Asbury made another important contribution to American Methodism by his interest in denominational education and his work for denominational schools. Dr. Nathan Bangs, in his estimate of Bishop Asbury, thinks that one of the defects of his administration was his indifference to education, especially in the ministry.[1] It is doubtless on this last clause that Dr. Bangs would have the emphasis laid. How much thought could this great ecclesiastic, who carried a continent on his heart, to whose ear came from many quarters the cry for workers, give to ministerial

[1] *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church,* vol. ii, p. 413.



EBENEZER ACADEMY, BRUNSWICK COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Said to be the oldest Methodist school building standing in America. It was built probably about 1785



Photograph by Arthur Barneveld Bibbins

"WAKEFIELD," THE HOME OF HENRY WILLIS

A dear friend of Bishop Asbury and the first man ordained by him. Here Asbury was often a guest, and here the Conference of 1801 was held

training? It was hardly to be expected in those earliest days of the Church. Yet the fathers were not indifferent to it, as this extract from a letter of Freeborn Garrettson to his wife will show:

> Our Brother Ruter is here collecting books for a theological school. I gave him Prideux's Connected History. He will collect hundreds of dollars' worth in this city. There is strong talk at present of setting on foot such an institution for this Conference, and probably Rhinebeck will be the place for it.[1]

Surely, there is no indication that Bishop Asbury failed to appreciate the value of education. Before he had been in America ten years there can be found in his Journal this entry:

> November 30, 1779. We spent an evening at Widow Brady's and had some talk about erecting a Kingswood School in America.

Some months later, while in North Carolina with John Dickins, a graduate of Eton College, England, the founder of our publishing interests, they talked together of a school like Kingswood and at his request, on the 15th of June, 1780, Dickins drew up a subscription to raise funds to erect such an institution. Abel Stevens says that this was the first project of a literary institution among American Methodists. There are other entries in his Journal which show that he felt the burden of building Cokesbury College:

[1] Drew MSS.

> May 13, 1786. We find that the college is now only fit for covering and we are in debt nearly nine hundred pounds and money is scarce. Came to Baltimore to spend another tedious week.

That rather sounds as if the Bishop did not much enjoy raising money, even for colleges. When it burned he seems to have been completely discouraged:

> We have now a second and confirmed account that Cokesbury College is consumed to ashes, a sacrifice of about ten thousand pounds in about ten years. Its enemies may rejoice and its friends need not mourn. Would any man give ten thousand pounds per year to do and suffer again what I have done for that house, I would not do it. The Lord called not Whitefield nor the Methodists to build colleges. I wish only for schools; Dr. Coke wanted a college. I feel distressed at the loss of the library.

I think we may forgive that good man his momentary depression. What sacrifices he had made, what labors he had undertaken, what burdens he had carried, only he could know. Of course the Lord did not call Whitefield or the Methodists to build colleges *primarily*. He had for them at the first a more necessary task. They were to arouse the careless, to startle the impenitent into action, to point sinners to a Saviour, to announce the glad tidings of great joy—this was their first business. But they were not indifferent to the value of education. Asbury planted

schools throughout the connection—Ebenezer Academy in Virginia, Bethel in Kentucky, Cokesbury in Maryland, Bethel in South Carolina, and Wesley and Whitefield in Georgia. It is true that these were mostly failures. But the reasons for failure cannot justly be ascribed to him. On the contrary, throughout his entire life he seems to have been not only sympathetic with the idea of Christian education, but to him in large measure must be given the credit of initiating our Methodist scheme of secondary schools and colleges. It was by his efforts that the foundations of our educational system were laid, and he it was who more than any other of his time helped to fashion the spirit and purpose of our denominational schools.

CHAPTER XII

THE LENGTHENING SHADOWS

Francis Asbury began to grow old long before most men do. In the account which Drew, Coke's biographer, gives of the scene in Barratt's Chapel in November, 1784, when Coke and Asbury met for the first time, he speaks of the latter as 'that venerable man.' 'Venerable' at thirty-nine! But then life had been hard. Incessant hardships, travel, sickness, and immeasurable labors exacted heavy toll, and almost before the journey was well begun he was talking of the inn at the end of the Road. Old age was much in the thought of the preachers. 'Several of our preachers,' he writes in 1794, 'want to know what they shall do when they grow old; I might also ask, what shall I do?' He was even then looking toward the sunset days. In 1799 three physicians called into consultation advised that he entirely cease from preaching. At the General Conference the following year he desired to resign his office, but the Conference, with hearty unanimity, refused to permit him to do so. His health improved after a time, and

he took up again the full, heavy burden of the care of all the churches. His labors now became even heavier and more exacting. Having reached, through his unselfish devotion to his high calling in Christ Jesus, a position of unapproached influence and power, his services were sought in every direction. So great is his humility that the many demands upon him are not quite understood, and he complains of the exactions of preachers and people. 'They keep me busy,' he cries out, and then gives some of the reasons they urge:

> I must preach; I am senior; have long been absent; some never expect to hear me again; possible, I may never come again; I am reminded that such and such I dandled in my lap; the rich too, thirty years ago, would not let me approach them; now I must visit them and preach to them; and the Africans—dear, affectionate souls, bond and free—I must preach to them.

Again:

> It would seem as if the preachers think they are committing sin if they do not appoint preaching for me every day, and even twice a day.

No wonder that his soul protested. His flesh was failing him. 'My last two days' rides were severe; my flesh is not brass, nor my bones iron.' Hardships were not so easily borne now as in the former days:

> The perpetual changes of weather, and the com-

pany sometimes forced upon one on the road is disagreeable; but it is much worse in the cabins crowded with men, women, and children—no place to retire for reading, writing, or meditation: the woods are too cold for solitude at this season.

But how had he endured all this sort of thing so long! He could not sleep well—how could he sleep with 'excessive labor, a crowd of company, and hogs, dogs, and other annoyances'? Sometimes the prospect was more than mortal could endure: 'I called at a certain house—it would not do—and I was compelled to turn out again to the pelting of the wind and rain.' The elements he *could* tolerate. More than that, he loved the open. Rocks and trees were his brothers, the moon and stars his sisters, the earth his mother.

But as the years multiplied his friends tried more and more to shield him. What an exquisitely touching picture is this!

We took our departure at five o'clock, and rode to Shaw's, where we got corn in the ear at a dollar per bushel. We continued on until half-past six o'clock, then stopped, struck fire, and encamped under a heavy mountain dew, which, when the wind shook the trees, fell like rain upon us. Brother McKendree made me a tent of his own and John Watson's blankets, and happily saved me from taking cold whilst I slept about two hours under my grand *marquee*. Brother McKendree threw his cloak over the limb of a tree; and he and his companion took shelter underneath, and slept also. I will not be

rash, I dare not be rash in my protestations against any country; but I think I will never more brave the wilderness without a tent.

Dear, generous McKendree, himself not over strong and vigorous! And John Watson, who gave up his blankets too! There never was finer comradeship than the devotion of Methodist preachers one to another! But how little there was that Asbury's associates could do to ease his burdens, or his friends, however desirous they might be, to relieve him of his sicknesses!

I have been during my thirty-four days of afflictive illness at Harry Stevens'; kinder souls than this family I could not wish. I have not had a more severe attack since I have been in America; the doctor was seldom right, and medicines were not to be had, nor, indeed, the comforts and alleviations which surround a sick bed in the cities.

How far he had come on the Long Road from that day in 1771, when, impatient at the preachers who seemed unwilling to leave the cities, and saying, 'I will show them the way,' he had fared forth into the wilderness, may be judged by this half-expressed longing for the comforts of 'a sick bed in the city.' His strength had become weakness. His pain is more than he can bear—'O my jaws and teeth!' The poor man had reached the limit of patient endurance. But there was no end to the sufferings. 'O the rocks, hills, ruts, and stumps! My bones, my bones';

He has not strength to stand: 'I could only speak sitting. . . . I took a pew near the pulpit and taught from thence.' He puts on some plasters that are too vigorous, and his plight is such that even he smiles—'Here is a bishop who can neither stand to preach nor kneel to pray.' For one brief moment he allows himself to think of 'the *clover* of Baltimore circuit' and 'ease,' but quickly turns from the alluring picture: 'Not for me—toil, suffering, coarse food, hard lodging, bugs, fleas, and certain *et ceteras* besides.' It had surely come to be 'an awful day.' But he had not sought this position of responsibility, the Lord was his witness.

> I refused to travel as long as I could, and I lived long before I took upon me the superintendency of the Methodist Church in America, and now I bear it as a heavy load: I hardly bear it, and yet dare not cast it down, for fear God and my brethren should cast me down for such an abandonment of duty.

Immediately one episcopal tour is ended, however, he begins another. Now Boehm journeys with him, and now McKendree is of the party. Everywhere Asbury is hailed as an apostle. He has become a national figure. 'We must attend to our appointments, though we should speak but little, for the people wish to see us. We have lived and labored so long that we have become

a spectacle to men.' To many he was an object of reverence, to others of curiosity. 'The people were so wonderfully taken up with the novel sight of the little carriage, and still more of the strange-looking old man who was addressing them, that the speaker made little impression on his hearers.' Mothers bring their children to him that he may lay his emaciated hands in blessing on their heads. Old-time friends seek him out and beg him to visit them. They tell him that he is making his rides too long, 'Yet they will scarcely be denied when invited to their houses, making my rides longer still.' He begins now to think more of rest, and the very word, like the music of a brook, is sweet to him. His 'days are gliding swiftly by.' The end of the Road is not far distant. 'I have preached here, possibly for the last time.' He rides to Perry Hall: 'Alas, alas, what memories!' 'I parted at Deer Creek (ah, where to meet again!) with aged Father Boehm, and my ancient friend Watters.' He had been here the year after he arrived in America and many times thereafter, but this proved to be his last visit. Wherever he goes he is 'affectionately received by old and young.' He pays a visit to his 'much-esteemed friend,' Governor Worthington in Ohio, and suggests, at his friend's request, 'an inscription for the tombstone of his sainted sister.' He preaches in

the House of Representatives at Raleigh, North Carolina, and William Hill, the secretary of state, and several members of his family, are converted. While in Philadelphia he receives a visit from Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, the founder of Dickinson College, and one of the greatest men of the day, and Dr. Physick, the 'father of American surgery.' It was on the occasion of this visit, Boehm says, that as they were parting, perhaps for the last time, Bishop Asbury inquired what he should pay for their professional services.

'Nothing,' they answered, 'only an interest in your prayers.'

'As I do not like to be in debt,' said Bishop Asbury, 'we will pray now,' and kneeling, he prayed until the heavens opened that God would bless and reward them for their kindness to him. He makes a journey to Canada, fulfilling a desire of many years. In 1809, when in Kentucky, he had registered a vow, 'If spared, I shall see Canada before I die.' He now makes use of the interval between two Conferences for the journey. Had he not done so he would never have seen Canada, for the following year the war of 1812 was begun, and when peace was declared he was too feeble for so long a journey. He sets out once more for the Western Conference,

where, among others, he ordains James B. Finley, who, in later years, when it was undoubtedly 'safe' to tell the story, related this incident:

> Bishop Asbury said to the preachers: 'Brethren, if any of you shall have anything peculiar in your circumstances that should be known to the superintendent in making your appointment, if you will drop me a note, I will, as far as will be compatible with the great interests of the Church, endeavor to accommodate you.' I had a great desire to go west, because I had relatives, which called me in that direction, and it would be more pleasant to be with them; so I sat down and addressed a polite note to the Bishop, requesting him to send me west. My request was not granted. I was sent a hundred miles east. I said to him, 'If that's the way you answer prayers, you will get no more prayers from me.' 'Well,' he said, 'be a good son, James, and all things will work together for good.'

A few months later he is in Pennsylvania, where at Boehm's Chapel he preaches the funeral sermon of Martin Boehm, a sermon concerning which Henry Boehm said, 'I had heard the venerable Asbury often when he was great, and he was peculiarly great on funeral occasions, but then he far transcended himself.' He dispatches two missionaries to Mississippi. An invitation comes to him from the British Conference to revisit his native land at their expense. How it must have cheered his tired, lonely heart!

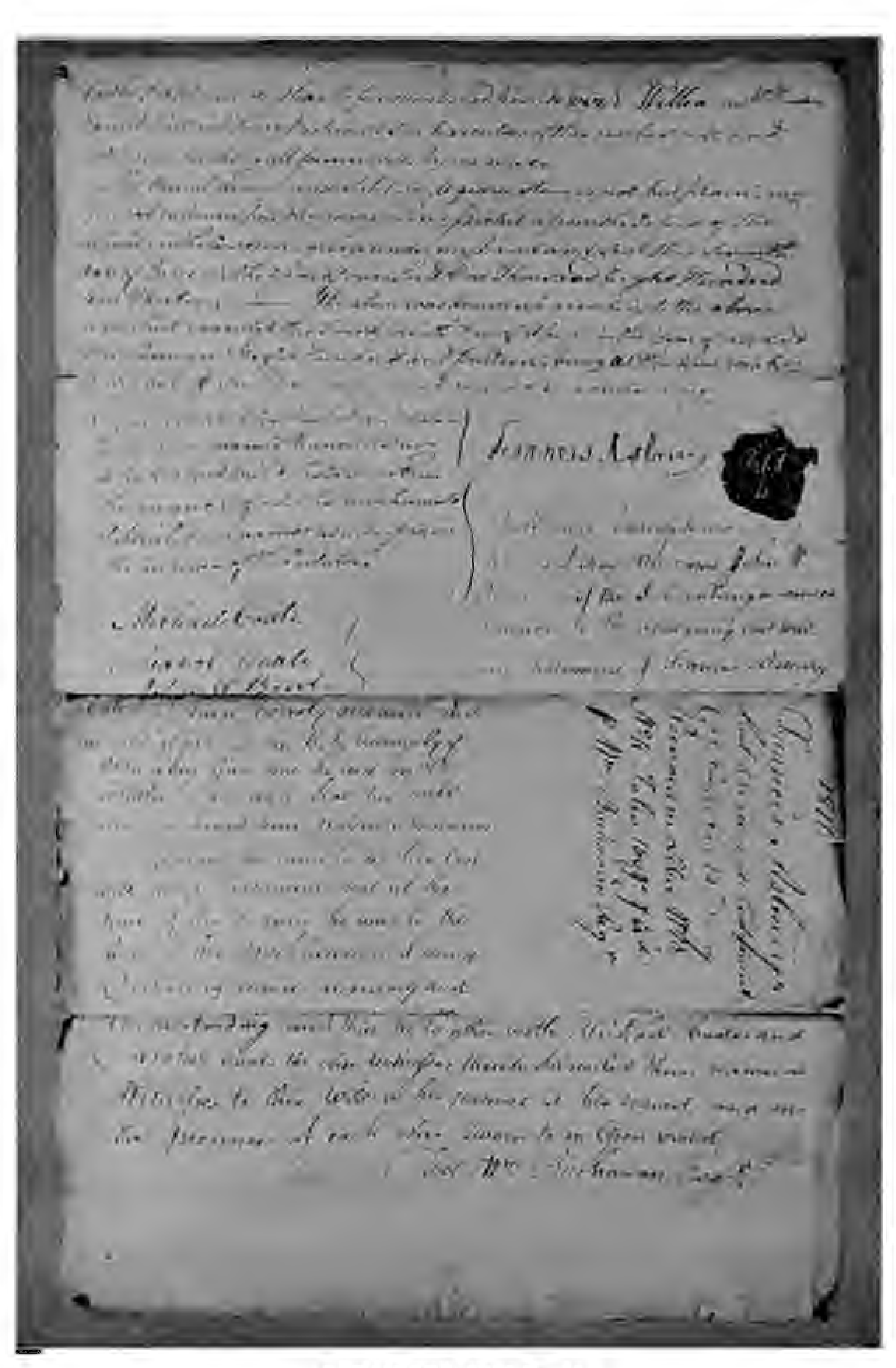
He gives 'an evening to the great Otterbein,' and found him happy in God. They spent a delightful hour together, and it was their last interview. He writes to his 'British brethren, thanking them for their kind invitation to visit them,' which, to his sorrow, he could not accept. Robert Hibbard, one of Bishop Asbury's sons in the gospel, and who had offered himself as a missionary for the province of Lower Canada, having been drowned while crossing the Saint Lawrence, Asbury very appropriately preached his funeral sermon during the session of the New York Conference at Amenia, New York, for a considerable period the seat of one of Methodism's most famous schools.

June 6, 1813, he enters in his Journal:

> Knowing the uncertainty of the tenure of life, I have made my will, appointing Bishop McKendree, Daniel Hitt, and Henry Boehm my executors. If I do not in the meantime spend it, I shall leave, when I die, an estate of two thousand dollars, I believe: I give it all to the Book Concern. This money, and somewhat more, I have inherited from departed Methodist friends, in the State of Maryland, who died childless; besides some legacies which I have never taken. Let it all return, and continue to aid the cause of piety.

In life, in death, all that he was, all that he had was consecrated to Methodism. How often he had testified, 'I am a Methodist'! In the

ASBURY'S WILL, I



ASBURY'S WILL, II

denomination he lived and moved and had his being. To the denomination he gives his all.

His friends are passing away one by one. He visits the home of his long-time friend, Henry Willis, and from the door of the house looked out upon his tomb:

> Rest, man of God! Thy quiet dust is not called to the labor of riding five thousand miles in eight months, to meet ten Conferences in a line of sessions from the District of Maine to the banks of the Cayuga, to the States of Ohio, of Tennessee, or Mississippi, to Cape Fear, James River, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and to the completion of the round. Thou wilt not plan and labor the arrangements of the stations of seven hundred preachers; thou wilt not attend camp meetings, and take a daily part in the general ministration of the Word; and often consume the hours which ought to be devoted to sleep in writing letters upon letters! Lord, be with us, and help us to fulfill the task given us!

He starts yet once more for the West. With much difficulty and under constant weariness and pain he reached Kentucky and later held the Tennessee Conference, which met that year at Reese Chapel. The thought uppermost in his mind was that the end was rapidly drawing near, and what he did he must do quickly. 'I preached to the people here [West Union] for the first time; may it not be for the last also?' 'On the peaceful banks of the Saluda I write my valedictory address to the presiding elders.' One

can easily imagine how tender it was, and with what urgency he pleaded with them 'to seek and to save that which was lost.' The year closed at Rembert's. 'Let me live every moment to God! Time is short,' was his final entry in his Journal, this, his last year of unbroken toil.

Now his labors are frequently interrupted by severe attacks of illness which confine him for considerable periods to his bed. Yet his indomitable will continued to drive him on almost as in the former days. His passion for souls, his love of his brethren, his concern for the work would not let him rest, even though he was approaching his seventieth year. His rheumatism bothered him more and more. At times he could not wear his shoes. Often now he was 'hobbling about on crutches.' He found much difficulty in riding on horseback. Long since he had parted with 'Spark,' which had gone lame, for twenty dollars, and which 'when about to start whickered after us; it went to my heart.' Of course it did. Asbury had been unfailingly kind to his horses, 'Jane,' 'Fox,' 'Spark,' and others, which had faithfully carried him on his long journeys. Philadelphia friends now give him 'a light, little four-wheeled carriage,' into which he could be easily lifted, for he insisted on going *forward.* He *must* attend every Conference. So he journeyed to Virginia, which he had first visited in

1774, again in 1780, and every year thereafter. As he rides, he indulges in reminiscences: 'I suppose I have crossed the Allegheny Mountains sixty times.' At the Baltimore Conference he paid a just tribute to Philip Otterbein, 'the holy, the great Otterbein, whose funeral discourse it was intended to be.' Crowded houses greeted him during the Conference in Philadelphia. As he journeys north through New Jersey only kindness and affection everywhere make it possible for him to continue. But even these wearied him:

I would not be loved to death, and so came down from my sick-room and took to the road, weak enough. Attentions constant, and kindness unceasing, have pursued me to this place, and my strength increases daily. I look back upon a martyr's life of toil and privation and pain, and I am ready for a martyr's death. The purity of my intentions, my diligence in the labors to which God has been pleased to call me, the unknown sufferings I have endured—what are all these? The merit, atonement, and righteousness of Christ alone make my plea.

In August, 1814, he is in Ohio once more, at Zanesville, where he gave what he felt might be his 'valedictory.' But in the providence of God he was to be there yet once more the following year. He spent a week with his dear friends, the Worthingtons. At Cincinnati he had a hemorrhage, and was unable to preside at the Con-

ference there. Neither was Bishop McKendree present, having been thrown from his horse and injured. Now, in spite of his weakness, he is making his way through South Carolina. John Wesley Bond, designated by the Philadelphia Conference as his traveling companion, is with him, and his attentions are so solicitous and tender that Asbury marvels.

> 'Is there his equal to be found in the United States?' he asks; 'he drives me along with the utmost care and tenderness, he fills my appointments by preaching for me when I am disabled, he watches over me at night after the fatigue of driving all day, and if, when he is in bed and asleep, I call, he is awake and up in an instant to give me medicine, or to perform any other service his sick father may require of him; and this is done so readily, and with so much patience, when my constant infirmities and ill health require so many attentions!'

Asbury finds pleasure in the fifth volume of Saurin's *Sermons,* which he is reading as he moves south into Georgia, and when he is too weak to read, his 'excellent son,' John Bond, reads aloud to him. Every post seems to him a messenger of sad tidings, bringing news of the death of friends. January, 1815, finds him in North Carolina once more; February, in Virginia; March, in Maryland; April, in Delaware, where he preached for the last time in Barratt's Chapel, 'in great feebleness of body,' and dined with

Judge Andrew Barratt, at his urgent request, 'for,' said he, 'I know that my father and mother thought more of you than of any other man upon the earth; and well does it become their son to respect you.' Then he proceeds into Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and to New York, where he 'attended the North Church, and gave a discourse,' which was 'something between talking and preaching.' The next day he was forty miles up the Hudson at Croton, where was located the home of Governor Van Cortlandt, a name which appears frequently in Asbury's Journal, a hearty Methodist, very rich, and a dispenser of a lavish hospitality, enjoyed by such well-known men as Washington, Lafayette, Franklin, and Whitefield, the last named preaching from the portico of the stately mansion to vast throngs. Asbury was often his guest, but now he finds the house lonely, for 'the dear, aged man has gone to his rest.' He pushes on to Albany, where 'poor, wheezing, groaning, coughing Francis visited the Conference chamber on Tuesday and Thursday,' and where by vote of the Conference he preached the funeral sermon for Dr. Coke, 'of blessed mind and soul, a gentleman, a scholar, and a bishop to us; and as a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labors, and in services, the greatest man in the last century,' who had died suddenly at sea the previous year

while on his way to establish a mission in India, and been buried in the Indian Ocean.

Now follows a rapid tour through New England and other States to Ohio: 'We reckon that since the twentieth of June'—it was now August 11—'we have passed through New Hampshire' —he had just previously been in Connecticut and Massachusetts—'Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Ohio, to Muskingum River, making nine hundred miles, two hundred of which ought, in our opinion, to be called the worst on the continent.' Is there no rest for the sick, emaciated, suffering old hero? Not yet. The day's work is not finished. So he 'preached on the campground,' and 'to a small congregation in the chapel at Chillicothe,' and 'visited from house to house,' held the Ohio Conference, and 'came away to Cincinnati,' where he and Bishop McKendree 'had a long and earnest talk,' in which Bishop Asbury prophesied great prosperity for the Methodism of the 'western part of the empire,' a prophecy fulfilled many times over, and in which he told his 'colleague that having passed the first allotted period (seventy years), and being as he knew, out of health,' he must lay down part of his burden. The end is approaching. He goes into Tennessee, and on the way 'gave many Testaments to the poor,' and at one place on the route

had 'a marriage, a funeral, and a baptism,' which led him to exclaim with grim humor: 'Well, make the best of me while you have me. It will not be often. I shall not be here long.' No, he will not be there often! The day is far spent, the night is at hand. October twentieth he opened the Tennessee Conference, preaching and ordaining deacons and elders, then surrendered his commission. 'My eyes fail. I will resign the stations to Bishop McKendree, I will take away my feet.' Surrendered it too with a shout: 'Whether health, life, or death, good is the will of the Lord. I will trust him. Yea, and will praise him. He is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Glory! Glory! Glory!' Dear, brave soul!

Now the day is over,
  Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
  Fall across the sky.

This was the last Conference he attended. He had preached his last ordination sermon, stationed his preachers for the last time. Never again would he join with the itinerants in singing that well-known hymn with which every Methodist Conference is opened,

And are we yet alive
  And see each other's face?

His brethren would not look upon his face again.

After the adjournment of the Conference the Man Without a Home started on the Long Road once more. He could not go home—he had no home; so he just kept going. He spent three days with Father Holt, another at Thomas Harrison's. He found Captain Hill, as usual, 'very kind and attentive.' At Boling's he was 'greatly amazed by a brigade of Kentuckians, drunk and disorderly.' A Quarterly Meeting at Samuel Edney's gave him an opportunity to bear 'a feeble but faithful testimony.' He preached from Acts 26. 17-18—the last text given in his Journal. As he discourses the faces of his preachers came up before him, and he gave them words of dying counsel:

> Thus gospel truth and gospel ministers find sinners; and they must be preached to with energy. And these ministers must be sent; and to be qualified for this mission they must, like Paul, be convinced, convicted, and converted, and sanctified. Like him, they must be preserved from the violence of the people, but especially from their indulgences and flatteries. 'Turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' A faithful minister will have these signs to follow him.

'I die daily,' he writes. He tarries for a little at Allen Glover's, because 'my children will not let me go out,' the childless, homeless man says. Forty miles further on he rests at Dr. William Moon's. His heart is growing weaker, and this

good physician gives him digitalis. Again he preached, and there was 'a time of great feeling.' A week later he has reached Columbia, South Carolina. The entries in his Journal are now infrequent and brief:

Dec. 3. I preached on this Sabbath. I live in God from moment to moment.

Dec. 7. We met a storm and stopped at William Baker's, Granby.

Thus with dramatic abruptness closes the personally written record of the life of the great and good man, bishop and shepherd of souls.

After this last entry in his Journal Bishop Asbury lived nearly four months, his death occurring Sunday, March 31, 1816. During these months his zeal knew no diminution, notwithstanding his extreme debility. Consumption had laid hold upon his broken body, and it was with extreme difficulty that he continued his journey. He hoped to be present at the General Conference which was to assemble in Baltimore on the second of May, and bent all his remaining energies to this end. His great mind rose superior to his bodily weakness, and he pressed on. Impelled by that unquenchable thirst to do good by which he had been driven for more than fifty years, he continued to journey from place to place, as his waning strength would permit, frequently preaching, until he came to Rich-

mond, Virginia, where he preached his last sermon, March 24, 1816, in the old Methodist church. Previous to his entering upon this last pulpit exercise, some of his friends, perceiving his great weakness of body, endeavored to dissuade him from preaching; but he resisted their entreaties by saying that he must once more deliver his public testimony in that place. Yielding to his desire to proclaim for the last time the counsel of his God, they carried him from the carriage in which he rode—for he was unable either to walk or stand—to the pulpit, and seated him on a table prepared for that purpose. Though he had to make frequent pauses in the course of his sermon, for the purpose of recovering breath, he spoke nearly an hour with much feeling and effect from Romans 9. 28: 'For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.' The audience was much affected, and crowded about him at the close of the service to receive his parting blessing. Having delivered his testimony, he was carried from the pulpit, and taken to his lodgings.

Thus ended the mighty preacher's public labors on the earth. Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday of that week he traveled, hoping to reach Fredericksburg, but the weather was inclement, and his strength failing rapidly he was glad

Mite subscription opened, and continued for the year 1816.

Rev.d Francis Asbury — $	1
Rev.d John W Bond — —	1
James T. Wynne	1
Rev. Jeremiah Bell — — —	25
Rev. John Bloom — —	50
James Jenkins —	25
John M Cherry —	25
James Mills — —	25
Isaac Moore — — —	12½
John Mitchel	25c
Milly Holt — — —	25
Claudius Allen —	25
Pleasant Reed — — — —	06¼
Elliott Grills — — — —	1
Wesley Harrison	1
	$ 7 "43¾

Photographed from the Original in the Library of Drew Theological Seminary.

BISHOP ASBURY'S "MITE SUBSCRIPTION"

As the printed preface reads "for the purpose of raising, by small donations, a sum sufficient to aid and relieve the distressed ministers, and wives and children of the ministers." No one was permitted to give more than one dollar. This last "Mite Subscription" which Bishop Asbury ever carried with him through the Conferences was also to secure sufficient funds "to enable us to send out German, French, and Spanish missionaries." See Boehm's *Reminiscences*, pp. 455–458, for interesting facts concerning this last "Mite Subscription."

to rest at the home of his old friend George Arnold, about twenty miles from Fredericksburg. He seemed to realize that the end was drawing near, for when he heard the members of the family discussing an appointment for a meeting he quietly remarked that there was no need of haste, a remark so unusual that it gave Brother Bond much uneasiness. Toward evening he became greatly indisposed. His cough increased, and he obtained rest with difficulty, finding it impossible to lie down. About three o'clock in the morning he remarked that he had passed a night of great bodily suffering, and suggested that the end was drawing near. It was proposed to send for a physician, but he gave them to understand that it would be useless, that before the physician could reach him his breath would be gone, and the doctor could only pronounce him dead. Being asked if he had anything to communicate, he said that he had fully expressed his mind in relation to the Church in his addresses to Bishop McKendree and the General Conference, and had nothing more to add. About eleven o'clock on Sunday he inquired if it was not time for meeting, then in a moment recollecting himself he requested that the family might be called into his room for worship. What a memorable scene that was! The indomitable leader, now so emaciated that he seemed more

dead than living, was propped up in bed, and about him were his dear friends of many years, George Arnold, and the members of his household, and John Wesley Bond, for three years Asbury's devoted companion and helper. The last-named sang a hymn, offered a fervent prayer, and then read and expounded the twenty-first chapter of the book of Revelation, beginning, 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.' It was a familiar and loved chapter, for Asbury frequently preached from the sixth and seventh verses, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son,' and he must have listened with great joy. During these religious exercises he appeared calm and much engaged in devotion. When the meeting was over he called on Bond to read the 'mite subscription,' a subscription which Asbury circulated everywhere for the superannuated and other preachers. His preachers were in his thoughts to the very end. Being told that there were no others present except the family, he said no more. They offered him a little barley water, but he was unable to swallow, and shortly his speech began to fail.

Observing the obvious distress of his faithful comrade, he raised his dying hand and looked joyfully at him, as if to comfort him. A little later Bond asked him if he felt the Lord Jesus to be precious, and the valorous saint, now unable to speak, with much effort lifted both his hands in token of complete triumph. A few minutes after this, as he sat in his chair, with his head resting on Brother Bond's hand, without a struggle and with great composure, the old warrior entered into rest. As the shadows of that Sabbath were falling Bond sent a messenger to announce to Methodists everywhere the sad news: 'Our dear father has left us, and has gone to the Church triumphant. He died as he lived —full of confidence, full of love—at four o'clock this afternoon, Sunday, March 31, 1816.'

He was buried by those who were with him, in the family burying ground of George Arnold. Four weeks later the General Conference met in the Light Street Church, Baltimore. Bishop McKendree was present, but very feeble. After the organization, on the first day an address was presented from the members of the Church in Baltimore, asking for the privilege of removing the remains of Bishop Asbury from the place where they had been buried to Baltimore. Their request was granted, and the Rev. John Wesley Bond was desired to superintend their removal.

Five members of the General Conference were appointed to act in concert with the Baltimore brethren: Philip Bruce, Nelson Reed, Freeborn Garrettson, Lewis Myers, and George Pickering. On the ninth of May the body arrived, and was placed in the house of William Hawkins. The fact being announced to the General Conference by Stephen G. Roszel, they resolved to attend his funeral next morning, and appointed Henry Stead, William Case, Seth Mattison, and Henry Boehm to act as a guard of honor during the night. 'Never shall I forget that night,' says the last named; 'thought was busy in reviewing the past; the whole life of Bishop Asbury, particularly the five years I was with him, passed before me in review like a panorama. Five times that night, in imagination, I went with the Bishop around his large diocese, over the mountains and valleys. I thought of his self-denial, his deadness to the world, of his intense labors, his enlarged benevolence, his sympathy for the suffering; of the hundreds of sermons I had heard him preach, the prayers I had heard him offer; of the many times I had slept with him, and how often I had carried him in my arms.' At ten o'clock the next morning, May 10, the funeral services took place. There was a large gathering in and about the Light Street Church, where the body had been lying in state;



HOUSE WHERE BISHOP ASBURY DIED



ASBURY'S WATCH AND SPECTACLES
Now in the Bishops' collection in New York City

it was estimated that from twenty to twenty-five thousand people were assembled to pay honor to the distinguished dead. When the body was removed to the Eutaw Church, a mile away, at the head of the procession were Bishop McKendree and William Black, the representative of British Methodism to the General Conference; and John Wesley Bond and Henry Boehm, the surviving traveling companions, followed the coffin as chief mourners. Previous to the interment Bishop McKendree delivered a short discourse, about twenty minutes long, full of pathos. Asbury's remains rested in the vault of the Eutaw Church until June, 1854, when they were again disinterred and finally deposited in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Baltimore, where are buried many of Methodism's glorious dead—Robert Strawbridge, Reuben Ellis, Wilson Lee, Nathan Richardson, Jesse Lee, Hamilton Jefferson, John Haggerty, Abner Neal, James Smith, Enoch George, John Emory, Beverly Waugh, and others.

The brave pilgrim's journey is over. The greatest itinerant of the ages has come at last to the end of the Long Road, and behold there is a House at the end of the Road, and a light in the window and a welcome. At last the Man without a Home has found his Home.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN HIMSELF

WHAT manner of man was this preacher-leader of the pioneer age of Methodism? How did he look? What were his characteristics? How did he impress people? For answers to these and like inquiries you must look to some one besides the Man Himself. He has little to say about himself; he seems not to have thought any too well of himself. His reluctance to have his picture taken is well known. When the British Conference sent a formal request to him for his portrait, not until he was directed by the General Conference did he consent. He even apologized to his own mother for his seeming vanity in sending her a likeness of her long-absent son. In writing to this same good mother, whom he so dearly loved, after telling her of the progress of the work, in the next sentence he begs her constant prayers, 'for there certainly never was a man of smaller abilities raised so high.'[1] That reads much like the self-deprecia-tion of an apostle of the primitive Church. On another occasion Asbury told of an old German,

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

who taking him by the hand expressed the wish that he might be worthy to wash his feet; 'O,' said the meek, lowly bishop, 'if you knew what a poor sinful creature I am, you would hardly look at one so unworthy.' He was tender-hearted toward others, but severe with himself. No man could have been more rigid than he was in the requirements which he laid upon himself. He had an extremely tender conscience: 'My conscience smote me severely for speaking an idle word in company. It is very difficult for me to check my rapid flow of spirits when in company with my friends.' Poor man! he was always laying the whip on his own back. 'I was condemned for telling humorous anecdotes, and knew not whether it was guilt or fear, lest my friends should think I go beyond the bounds of prudence and liberty.' He greatly feared praise. 'A considerable degree of ballast is highly necessary to bear frequent and sudden puffs of applause.' How he was tempted to think more highly of himself than one ought to think!

Next day some of my friends were so unguarded and imprudent as to commend me to my face. Satan, ready for every advantage, seized the opportunity and assaulted me with self-pleasing, self-exalting ideas. But the Lord enabled me to discover the danger, and the snare was broken. May he ever keep me humble and little and mean in my own eyes.

And God heard his prayer. His humility was profound, but not surprising, for the task to which God summoned him was so vast, so awesome in its possibilities—influencing characters, determining eternal destinies, working upon immortal souls, steadying trembling, staggering men and women, bewildered by afflictions; opening the wicket gate to weary pilgrims at the end of the long journey, holding aloft ever, that the eyes of the living and dying might see it, the cross of Christ—this task was so overwhelmingly great, how could he enter upon it without a sense of utter unworthiness and sickening, stifling inadequacy?

As to his appearance, we must look to some of his contemporaries for these personal items. Boehm, who was much with him and knew him intimately, thus pictures him:

> Bishop Asbury was five feet nine inches high, weighed one hundred and fifty-one pounds, erect in person, and of a very commanding appearance. His features were rugged, but his countenance was intelligent, though time and care had furrowed it deep with wrinkles. His nose was prominent, his mouth large, as if made on purpose to talk, and his eyes of a bluish cast, and so keen that it seemed as if he could look right through a person. He had a fine forehead, indicative of no ordinary brain, and beautiful white locks, which hung about his brow and shoulders, and added to his venerable appearance. There was as much native dignity about him as any

man I ever knew. He seemed born to sway others. There was an austerity about his looks that was forbidding to those who were unacquainted with him. In dress he was a pattern of neatness and plainness. He could have passed for a Quaker had it not been for the color of his garments, which were black when I traveled with him. He formerly wore gray clothes. He wore a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, a frock coat, which was generally buttoned up to the neck, with straight collar. He wore breeches or small clothes, with leggings. Sometimes he wore shoe-buckles. Indeed, all the preachers, and I among the number, wore breeches and leggings till 1810, and then several left them off, which Bishop Asbury heartily disapproved.[1]

Joshua Marsden, a member of the British Conference, and who labored many years in Nova Scotia, spent some time in America, and having abundant opportunity to see and know Bishop Asbury, formed a great admiration for him. After Asbury's death he wrote an appreciation of him, which Boehm regarded as one of the best descriptions of the Bishop's personal appearance and character he had ever seen.

In his appearance he was a picture of plainness and simplicity, bordering upon the costume of the Friends; the reader may figure to himself an old man, spare and tall, but remarkably clean, with a plain frock coat, drab or mixed waistcoat, and small clothes of the same kind, a neat stock, a broad-brimmed hat with an uncommon low crown, while his white locks, venerable with age, added a sim-

[1] Boehm, *Reminiscences*, pp. 438, 439.

plicity to his appearance it is not easy to describe; his countenance had a cast of severity, but this was owing probably to his habitual gravity and seriousness: his look was remarkably penetrating; in a word, I never recollect to have seen a man of a more venerable and dignified appearance.

Jacob Gruber, than whom 'a more honest man or a bolder soldier of the cross ever lived,' a colleague of Boehm, twenty-five years after Asbury's death, by request wrote down some of his recollections of the bishop which are both naïve and interesting:

I was better acquainted with Bishop Asbury as a bishop and more intimate with him than any bishop of our church or any other. I was what some would call one of his 'privy counsellers' eight or nine years, and I know I had his confidence by the letters he wrote to me at different times, which I still think of with pleasure. The first time I saw him was when Jesse Lee traveled with him. There was an appointment for him to preach about forty miles from Philadelphia. The weather was warm, but a large congregation was gathered. Asbury was poorly and got Lee to preach, and he gave a plain and powerful exhortation after him. Some said they liked very well what the bishop preached, but they did not like what that old man said after him. They took the big man for the bishop, which mistake has been made more than once since, when a big man was preferred to a little man, bishop or not.

In eighteen hundred and three I met Bishop Asbury at Columbia and rode with him to Little



FRANCIS ASBURY IN MIDDLE LIFE

York. At dinner they offered me coffee. I refused to take or drink it. The bishop looked very sharp at me and said, 'Eat what is set before you.' I said, 'I do, sir, but I don't drink all that is set before me.' He was always very kind and friendly to me, told me what he thought wrong and what was the most excellent way. He required a particular account of each preacher and the state of each circuit in the district, how the work prospered, and in a district where he feared the preachers' families would be in want because money was scarce, how the preachers got their allowance. He advised me to say that the preachers should take provisions, wheat, rye, corn, oats, meat, potatoes, etc., etc., anything but whiskey. He would get all the information he could from circuits, preachers, letters, and presiding elders, etc., then make the appointments. Before he read them out he would sometimes say, 'It is wrong to be afraid or opposed to a circuit before you have seen it and tried it. Go to it, do the best you can, and if you don't like it come back to the next Conference and you shall have another. He had a great concern about the preachers' wives, that they should be examples like holy women of old, helpmeets, and labor with their husbands in the gospel, in the work of faith, the labor of love, and the patience of hope. He sometimes in time of Conference invited the preachers' wives to meet him at some convenient place and then gave them such directions and instructions as he saw necessary or proper, that they might not by their example pull down what their husbands built up by their preaching. . . . The Bishop frequently made particular inquiry about the Germans, and how they prospered. He had a great regard for Mr. Otterbein, Martin Boehm, and

others who were sometimes called German Methodists. On one occasion in time of conference in Baltimore he requested all the preachers of German descent with Otterbein, Boehm, and others to meet him at his lodging and in his room. We met and had a very solemn and interesting meeting. Bishop Asbury and Bishop McKendree addressed us, and compared the venerable Otterbein to Moses and the humble, loving Martin Boehm to Aaron, the saint of God. After this we were addressed in German by Moses and Aaron in a very edifying manner. We had a melting time. Some of us had to interpret the German and in putting it into English we compared our Asbury to Elijah and McKendree to Elisha. It was good for us to be there, for we had Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, greater and lesser prophets and a number of others, but the best of all was the Lord was with us.

The last time I saw him was between six and nine months before his death. He was going out to the West and I was coming in. We met among the mountains. Brother Bond was with him and driving his carriage. We stopped. I hitched my horse to a tree and got into the carriage, and sat and talked about a half an hour for the last time with the best friend I had in the world. After answering his questions about the preachers, and the circuits in the district, the work and prospects, etc., etc., he in a very solemn and earnest manner exclaimed, 'O, if I were young and strong again I would cry aloud, and spare not, I would warn and not cease, shew the people their sins, and professors their backslidings. The preachers must be more zealous, souls are perishing, many of our members are loving the world, laying up treasure

here. Our young people are following the fashions of the world, many are gay and proud, the children of plain old Methodists, what will become of them? What shall we do? Let us labor and strive to save as many as possible.' I wish I could recollect all his expressions on that memorable occasion. The above are a few of them in substance. He bade me an affectionate farewell. I wept, could scarce speak, looked after him as far as I could see him, then came on my way sorrowful, fearing I should see his face no more. And so it came to pass.[1]

Francis Asbury was only five feet nine inches tall, but spiritually and morally he was a giant. From every point of view his religious life loomed large. 'My general experience,' he said in 1802, 'is close communion with God, holy fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, a will resigned, frequent addresses to the throne of grace, a constant serious care for the prosperity of Zion, forethought in the arrangements and appointments of the preachers, a soul drawn out in ardent prayer for the universal Church and the complete triumph of Christ over the whole earth.' What a spiritual program is that! In spiritual aspirations and yearnings for holiness Thomas à Kempis did not excel him. With ardent expectation, yet with perfect dignity of soul, like Simeon, he waited for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

him. Prayer was a large part of his life. Thus he began every day: 'Rose this morning with a determination to fight or die, and spent an hour in earnest prayer.' Communion with God through prayer was his very life. 'Having a day of rest from public exercises, I spent it in meditation, prayer, and reading.' He was always planning to secure more time for prayer. 'I feel determined to use more private prayer, and may the Lord make me more serious, more watchful, and more holy.' Wherever he stopped for the night he prayed; wherever he ate he closed the meal with prayer. At the approach of Conference he sought opportunities of special prayer for divine guidance. At one time it was his practice to set apart three hours of every twenty-four for this spiritual exercise; at another period in his life he gave himself to private prayer seven times a day; at another time it was his habit to spend a part of every hour when awake praying; at still another, ten minutes of every hour. When men mocked him his revenge was a prayer that God would bless them. Freeborn Garrettson said of him that he prayed the most and prayed the best of any man he knew. If ever a man sought to live a life of prayer it was he. 'I am much employed in the spirit and duty of prayer,' he writes, 'but earnestly desire to be more so. My desire is that prayer should mix

with every thought, with every wish, with every word, and with every action, that all might ascend as a holy, acceptable sacrifice to God.'

How passionate were his longings for holiness! 'How I long to be as a pure, seraphic flame.' 'How greatly do I desire to die to everything which does not lead me to God.' Cowper's hymn was often upon his lips:

> The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from thy throne,
> And worship only thee.
>
> So shall my walk be close with God,
> Calm and serene my frame;
> So purer light shall mark the road
> That leads me to the Lamb.

His Journal is a portraiture of his spiritual aspirations. In my judgment, no man ever lived who more steadfastly yearned after holiness than Francis Asbury. Early and late, in log cabins and beneath the star-flecked sky, in the saddle, and when standing sentry on a dangerous frontier, everywhere and always, he hungered for holiness. It was one of the two great passions of his soul—personal holiness—the other, and greater even, being the salvation and sanctification of other precious souls.

It must not be thought, however, that his religion took the form of fanaticism, defying reason,

and being exclusive and bigoted. It was neither narrow nor whimsical, but rational, scriptural, and steady. Moreover, it was not formal, but vital. He was not hostile to the ritual of the Church; he had been brought up on it; he kept the festival days of the Christian year, but he hated sin and protested with all his soul against a mere profession of religion. His Christianity was a very vital thing, having its roots, not in logic or philosophy, but in spiritual passion. There was nothing of wild, unbridled enthusiasm in him, but a fervid, intelligent, and apostolic zeal, like that which actuated the apostles and martyrs. His sense of debt to God at all times was overwhelming. 'If I had a thousand hearts and tongues and a million of years to live, all would be insufficient for paying the mighty debt of praise.' 'This habitual, devout communion with God gave stability, serenity, loftiness to his spirit. It put him in direct connection with omnipotence. It placed at his command the resources of God in Christ. It enabled him, taking hold of the charter of gospel promises, to move God. It clothed the whole man with an authority which no ecclesiastical titles could pretend to. Intellectual greatness and mental accomplishments paled before the commanding majesty of this moral glory reflected in full beam upon his soul from Christ who is the light and

life of men.' Here in this close fellowship with God you have one of the secrets of his power. The chief fact in his life was his complete consecration. Jehovah was his strength and his shield, fed the flame of his passion through the long years—a passion so imperial, so impelling, that it drove him across seas, into cities and out of cities, through wildernesses and over mountains, without rest, through years of unbroken toil; a passion so lofty and so dominant that it made him impervious to hardships, restless in places of ease, enabled him to laugh at difficulties and mock at obstacles, buoyed him amid uncommon discouragements and held him steady amid distressing storms, until the very end of his fruitful ministry.

William Thacher, a member of the New York Conference, who died in 1856, after fifty-nine years of service, at the ripe age of 89, bears this testimony:

> Dear Bishop Asbury was a man whose presence seemed to me more attended with a holy atmosphere than any man in whose company I ever was. . . I had decided in 1797 to offer myself to the New York Annual Conference which was to meet at Wilbraham, Mass., he, being at that time confined by lameness at the house of Widow Sherwood in Yonkers, New York, and knowing my deficiency of means to equip myself for the work, and another preacher being in similar circumstances, drew $16.00 from his purse, and a valuable

silver watch from his pocket, and sent them on by Rev. J. Wells, to be divided between us, on condition that we would join the Conference. Such liberality from such poverty won my heart to the most faithful attachment to that devoted servant of God. . . . I saw him at the Conference of 1799 in New York when he as usual presided. This was the first Conference that I attended, where his consecrated hand ordained me a Deacon. Here, as a patriarch in the midst of his sons he was the life of the solemn and interesting scene, so new to me. It was evident that nothing was so dear to him as the cause of God, and the prosperity of the church in which he held such an important place. All his conversation, all his travels, all his sermons and all the particulars of his administration unequivocally spoke the same thing. . In 1803 I was favored with his company on return from a session of the New York Conference at Ashgrove, 45 miles northeast of Troy, to my residence in Yonkers, about 22 miles from New York. All his manner showed that he was in the spirit and presence of his Lord. On the last day of that ride, as the day dawned, he touched me on the side and pleasantly roused me from a sweet sleep, and led the way for an early start on our journey. We rode ten miles through the Fishkill mountains before breakfast. We alighted at the door of a venerable Scotch brother, a magistrate, who gave us a hearty welcome. I then introduced my fellow traveler by name, but the humility, plainness and affability of his stranger-guest were so unlike, in his view, to Episcopal majesty that it seemed not to have entered his mind that his plain table was graced with the presence of a bishop in the Church of God; but after prayer, as we were about to

separate our hospitable 'Squire, John Likely, would obtain from me information: 'In what part of the world was our worthy Bishop Asbury now?' and regretting that he had never been honored with the sight of *that great man*. Had you seen the muscles of the bishop's face at this juncture, you must have had a heavy heart to have commanded the muscles of your own face. The secret came out and our kind host electrified with surprise, burst forth with the fulness of his joy.[1]

Asbury's intuitions were almost uncanny in their exactness. When in the latter years of his life (1813) a friend remarked on his ability to recall faces and names, he said, 'Ah, I am a mere child now. The time has been, when I got one good look at a man's face, I could know him anywhere.' 'He had none of Williams's wild earnestness; he was without the charm of Strawbridge or the gentle harmlessness of Richard Whatcoat. He had not the thorough humanness of Jesse Lee, nor the mystical tenderness and strength of Freeborn Garrettson.' But in practical sagacity, love of order, keenness of perception, promptness of mental actions, shrewd common sense, philosophic imperturbability, affable, dignified goodness none of his confreres surpassed or equaled him.

He was a true patriot, even if he was regarded by many as an enemy of the country. Though

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

he never became a citizen of the United States, his devotion to the land of his adoption was complete. In a letter written in 1773 to a friend in England he exclaims, 'One fault I have to find with the people, they are too disloyal; there are too many murmurers against government.'[1] He could never be tolerant of perfidy. Slavery in his eyes was hideous; his was the heart of a freeman. Even if he did not concern himself with politics he was not ignorant of national affairs, nor did he fail to make his full contribution to the national life. When Washington was inaugurated President, April 30, 1789, the New York Conference being in session Asbury suggested to it the propriety of presenting a congratulatory address to the President, which was done, the duty of reading the address to Washington, at the meeting arranged for this purpose, devolving upon Asbury. In 1811 Bishop Asbury, in fulfillment of a desire of many years, visited Canada. As he was crossing the boundary line he was conscious of a marked sensation—'My strong affection for the people of the United States came with strange power upon me.' As has been remarked elsewhere, Asbury's influence upon the new republic was beyond computation. It has been said that John Wesley saved England. So also, and in the

[1] Drew MSS.

same manner, did Francis Asbury save America. For more than this even must he be given honor. After coming to America he saw his adopted country pass through two wars; he saw its political independence secured and a form of government successfully organized; he witnessed too the establishment of the reputation of the people for bravery, patriotism, energy of character, intelligence, and love of social order, and the nation coming to an honorable place among the nations of the earth. It is doubtful, however, if he had any just conception of the part he had played in obtaining these results; probably he did not, but so far as moral forces are concerned his own undeviating loyalty, his vast itinerant labors, his wide acquaintance throughout all the States and in the wilderness regions beyond made a contribution above that of any other man.

What an imperial figure is this peerless servant of God! In the long list of Christian worthies in the heroic age of the republic by common consent he stands first. There may be some doubt as to who ranks second, but there can be no debate as to who is chiefest among them all. Thomas Ware found something in his person, his piercing eye, his impressive mien, and in the music of his voice which compelled the attention of all who saw and heard him. He

was a man of commanding power, with interesting and effective characteristics and strong personal qualities. He was always the gentleman, even though he did write to his mother: ' 'Tis one great disadvantage to me that I am not polite enough for the people. They deem me fit for the country, but not for the cities; and it is my greater misfortune I cannot, or will not learn, and they cannot teach me.'[1] But he was unfair to himself. How courteous, tactful, gracious, and kind he was! In his relations with women he was always considerate. His relations with men were equally unselfish and beneficent. He never married, in part because of his fine sense of justice and his high respect for woman. It was not fair to any woman to bind her in marriage to a man who must be absent from home fifty-one weeks in every year. 'It is neither just nor generous,' he declares. Before leaving England he was attached to a young woman, but this was broken off by his mother,[2] which fact throws light upon a sentence in a letter to his mother, which Dr. Charles J. Little said he would give much to know the meaning of. It was after he had been some time in America that writing the mother whom he so tenderly loved, and telling her why it seemed best to him not to return home, he gave as a reason, 'because of what happened

[1] Emory Collection of MSS. [2] Ibid.

to me when I was in England.' She did not need to be told what it was; she knew! But once immersed in the work laid upon him by the return to England of his colleagues at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, though he had much reverence for the Christian home and would have had great happiness in a home of his own, he could not thereafter think of marriage. He had many friends, however, in every section of the country, and friends who really loved him. 'I had so many friends I knew not where to go,' he wrote on one occasion; on another, 'My dear friend Governor Bassett and his lady came forty miles to meet me.' This seems to have been a custom with many of his friends, to ride to meet him and accompany him on his journey. It was only in this way that he could give time to the cultivation of his friendships. He never loitered, never was betrayed by the joys of fellowship into tarrying. 'My friends came in haste and gladness to see me. We prayed and parted, for time was precious.'

Ordinarily company bored him, but no man could have been more approachable to children. How children loved him! 'Mother,' breathlessly shouted a little boy as he ran into the house, 'I want my face washed and a clean apron on, for Bishop Asbury is coming and I am sure he will hug me up!' On his first visit to the home of

Henry Willis a few weeks after that good man's death, he 'kissed and encircled in his arms the six orphaned children of his departed friend and blessed them in the name of the Lord.' When he is ill children read to him the *Life of John Bruen* or Doddridge's *Sermons to Young People*, and he in turn teaches them and others 'a little grammar.' On one occasion, not being able because of illness to do anything with his books, and in order not to be wholly idle, he 'wound cotton broaches among the children.' Briggs, commenting on this entry in Asbury's Journal, says that a more pathetic yet sublime and instructive episode in the history of a devoted human life is not to be found. A man worn and utterly prostrated by his magnanimous labors for others, still without a single thought for himself; burdened with the care of newly formed churches scattered over a thousand miles, and unable to serve them even by letter, yet using the little strength that remained to him in winding cotton and speaking to children. Parents, dying, left their children to his care. Mothers desired their sons to be like him. John Emory, brilliant and devoted, writing to his mother from Philadelphia, tells her that he has had the pleasure of riding some distance with Bishop Asbury, and that he 'is very affectionate toward me. . . . You have told me that you

wished me to be like Father Asbury. You meant perhaps chiefly in one respect. Ah, mother, it may be you did not then think of the bearing of your advice, but why not still adhere to it, and, should it be required, say, "My son, go leave your mother, and should you never see her again, follow the calls of the Lord."' No man could be like him who had not his wealth of affection and his 'will to do and soul to dare.' But having once companied with him, having seen the lines of care on his face, and heard the vibrant, passionate call of his soul to self-abandon for the sake of Christ, having warmed oneself with the fires of his heart and felt the power of his rare devotion, one was ready to die for him, or go to the uttermost parts of the earth without a murmur at his command.

Stern, austere, brusque even, when weighed down with cares, yet how simple he is, and how easily pleased! With the glee of a little child he records that he is able to put on his leather shoes once more. He had the heart of a child. Now and again he is playful. Being told that he would find it impossible to cross a swollen river, he relates how with 'the guidance of a Baptist friend' he achieved the impossible. One can almost hear his laughter as he exclaims:

Wonders will never cease. Nothing would serve but I must marry Thomas Morrell to a young

woman! Behold Father Morrell, seventy-five; Father Whatcoat, sixty-six; Francis Asbury, fifty-seven, and the ceremony performed, solemnly, at the solemn hour of ten at night!

This same Thomas Morrell had written in *his* Journal ten years before this, 'Bishop Asbury preached the most humorous sermon I ever heard from him.' The accounts were now even! On another occasion Asbury mirthfully observed: 'If I were as grave as Bishop McKendree, I would live but a short time.' Ordinarily solemn in manner, inclined to taciturnity in private circles, he was a charming conversationalist, and would relate amusing incidents and droll experiences. 'As a road companion no man could be more agreeable; he was cheerful almost to gaiety; his conversation was sprightly and sufficiently seasoned with wit and anecdote. His manners and disposition in every family were all suavity and sweetness.' Of one of the young preachers he said:

> I find the care of a wife begins to humble my young friend, and makes him very teachable: I have thought he always carried great sail; but he will have ballast now.

Naturally witty and satirical, good sense and grace always were regnant, and he never was undignified or malicious.

Asbury was generous in his estimate and treat-

ment of his co-workers, discriminating and careful in matters of judgment, without rashness, submitting every question to his reason and with patient consideration reaching his conclusions. He had powers of observation, and used them. He had too his foibles and passions, but they were subdued, and in a real sense eradicated. 'He had some few peculiarities,' Rufus Wiley recalled in 1841, but he does not tell us what they were, and 'neither history nor tradition has informed us of any positive faults.' He was unimaginative, but not without vision. His Journal shows how prosy and commonplace his thoughts were, and at the same time how unusual and sublime his expectation. His glowing optimism burned into a red heat his matter-of-factness. He was not brilliant; there is nothing of intellectual greatness even. Nor was he a man of genius. He had not thus been endowed beyond his brethren. His mental processes were slow. His humor, though abundant, is clumsy. There are no swift flashes as of lightning. He does not scintillate, but his mind burns steadily, unfailingly, helpfully, and where he walks there is light and heat. He probably would have seemed out of place in a French salon, but even there he would have made himself heard and felt.

There are elements of power other than those springing out of unusual physical or mental

endowments. His conspicuous qualities, those through which he achieved, were in the moral and spiritual realm. Like his Lord, he was acted upon from above. 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' was the dynamic in both lives. 'I must work the works of him that sent me.' These are words which fell from the lips of Him who 'came not to be ministered unto but to minister.' They were echoed by one like unto Him. Francis Asbury was an eighteenth century incarnation of Eternal Will. Kitchener of Khartoum, more than any man in this modern age, is like this Prophet of the Long Road, save in the one most important respect, that Kitchener is without spiritual ideals, while Asbury was dominated by them. But just as Kitchener in an hour of crisis has seemed to be 'the living expression of the Will of the entire British Empire,' so Francis Asbury to his age was the Will of Jehovah and the heavenly hosts.

Though, as we have seen, Asbury was passionately devoted to his parents, Dr. Little says that he was a man who could have broken his mother's heart. Letters which he wrote her seem to confirm this:

I hope, my dear Mother, you are more easy. Why will you mourn in such a manner? If you have given me to the Lord, let it be a free-will offering, and don't grieve for me. . As for me, I know

what I am called to. It is to give up all, and have my hands and heart in the work; yea, the nearest and dearest friends. And I am content, and will do it. Nay, it is done. Christ is all to me. Let others condemn me, as being without natural affection, as being stubborn, disobedient to parents, or say what they please. It does not alter the case; for it is a small matter with me to be judged of man. I love my parents and friends: but I love my God better.[1]

And again;

I cannot comply at present with your request. You would not have me leave the work God hath called me to for the dearest friend in life.[2]

It is not surprising that many failed to understand him. Some of his contemporaries even represent him as desiring preeminence. Devereux Jarratt, evangelical rector of an Episcopal parish in Virginia, writes of 'his strong passion for superiority and thirst for domination' as contributing to the variety of his work and the extent of his itinerating. But is he not mistaken? Is it a 'passion for superiority' which drives Asbury over the Alleghenies sixty times? Is it not, rather, a passion for men, a divine Will to save them? Shall we not accept his own explanation at face value?

Why should I wish to stay in this land? I have no possessions or babes to bind me to the soil. What are called the comforts of life I rarely enjoy. The

[1] Emory Collection MSS.
[2] Ibid.

wish to live an hour such a life as this would be strange to so suffering, so toilworn a wreck, but God is with me and souls are my reward.

Nicholas Snethen, who traveled with him when Asbury was in his prime, says, 'It cannot be concealed that he was not incapable of the exercise of that awful attribute of power, hard-heartedness, to those individuals, feelings, and interests which seemed to oppose the execution of public plans. Constantly in the habit of making the greatest personal sacrifices to the public good, his mind would not balance between the obligations of duty and the accommodation or convenience of others.' But does not Snethen use the wrong word? Asbury was not hard-hearted. He was fixed in his purposes, immovable in his resolves. His was a firmness that never yielded, an energy that never flagged, a heroism more than Roman. Yet in the interests of harmony, as has been observed by more than one writer, he was capable of what to an imperiously honest nature are the greatest of all sacrifices—the sacrifice of honest conviction, of cherished habits of action, and of slowly matured purposes. He was neither heartless nor stubborn.

He did indeed exercise arbitrary power, but in those days of foundation building it was essential to the achievement of his object. We must, therefore, regard it as fortunate that he had the



Photograph by Arthur Barneveld Bibbins

BISHOPS' LOT, MT. OLIVET CEMETERY, BALTIMORE
The tall monument at the right marks the grave of Bishop Asbury, the one at the left the grave of Robert Strawbridge

ability to organize and the will to direct. If at any point in his superintendency there had been hesitation or shrinking, it would have been reckoned as weakness; if there had been timidity, men would have called it cowardice. Better be thought a despot than a halting, purposeless weakling, without courage of convictions and with no solemn sense of duty.

> Better the more than less,
> Better the excess than the defect.
> Better like Hector on the field to lie
> Than like a perfumed Paris turn and fly.

The authority which he wielded was spiritual. Benjamin M. Adams told me that Aaron Hunt, a distinguished minister of the New York Conference who died in 1858 at the age of ninety years, once said he always knew something hard was coming to him, either a hard circuit or a presiding eldership when Bishop Asbury took him off to pray with him. Ira Ellis recalled many years afterward a prayer of Asbury's at a Conference, when some of the preachers were heard complaining about their all too meager support, and were facing the work and support, or lack of support, of the new Conference year with mutterings of discontent. Listening for a time without rebuke or comment, Bishop Asbury suddenly said, 'Let us pray,' and this is the way he talked with God:

> Lord, we are in thy hands and in thy work. Thou knowest what is best for us and for thy work, whether poverty or plenty. The hearts of all men are in thy hands. If it is best for us and for thy Church that we should be cramped and straitened, let the people's hands and hearts be closed. If it is better for us—for the Church—and more to thy glory that we should abound in the comforts of life, do thou dispose the hearts of those we serve to give accordingly; and may we learn to be content, whether we abound or suffer need.[1]

And there was a great calm. Money no longer obscured their vision. They arose, went forth, and conquered. It was thus that he exercised dominion over men. He was imperious, but without haughtiness; he exerted regal authority, but without arrogance! Stevens says that his power was military which he used with military energy, but that he imposed on the ministry no task that he did not himself exemplify. Even more was his power spiritual, used with spiritual energy. It was through the offering of himself daily on the cross that the forces of righteousness were led by him to victory on all fields.

Asbury was a reader of books, an effective preacher, an organizer with genius and vision, a faithful shepherd, a tireless itinerant, a founder of schools, a wise and successful administrator, but it is not necessary to his fame that his pre-

[1] Emory Collection MSS.

eminent ability in any one of these fields be established. His rank among the New-World prophets rests upon something else. The glory of his distinguished career is to be found in the supreme teaching of his long life. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' Losing his life he found it. The servant of all became the chiefest among many mighty. Self-sacrifice is essential to the establishing of a Church and the carrying of it forward. It was thus that Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road, laid the foundation and reared the structure of American Methodism.

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